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MAM' LINDA

1. Fiction, American

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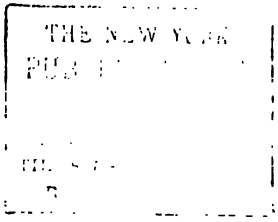

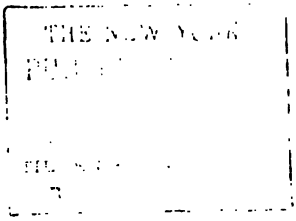

[See p. 170

"SHE STOOD LOOKING AT HER IMAGE IN THE MIRROR"

[illegible]

A Novel.

By

Will N. Harben

Author of

"[illegible]" "[illegible]"

"[illegible]"

Illustrated by

F. B. Masters

New York and London

[illegible]

1907

Mam' Linda

A Novel

By

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Author of
"Ann Boyd" "Pole Baker"
"Abner Daniel" etc.

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New York and London
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1907

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ANN BOYD
MAM' LINDA

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY FATHER

Illustrations

"SHE STOOD LOOKING AT HER IMAGE IN THE MIRROR" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"'WHY, IT'S THIS HERE DEVILMENT THAT'S BREWIN' BETWIXT DAN AN' CARSON DWIGHT'" . . . . *Facing p.* 14

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Mam' Linda

Mam' Linda

I

IN the rear of the long store, at a round table under a hanging-lamp with a tin shade, four young men sat playing poker. The floor of that portion of the room was raised several feet higher than that of the front, and between the two short flights of steps was the inclining door leading to the cellar, which was damp and dark and used only for the storage of salt, syrup, sugar, hardware, and general rubbish.

Near the front door the store-keeper, James Blackburn, a portly, bearded man of forty-five, sat chatting with Carson Dwight, a young lawyer of the town.

"I don't want any of you boys to think that I'm complaining," the elder man was saying. "I've been young myself; in fact, as you know, I go the gaits too, considering that I'm tied down by a family and have a living to make. I love to have the gang around—I *swear* I do, though sometimes I declare it looks like this old shebang is more of a place of amusement than a business house in good standing."

"Oh, I know we hang around here too much," Carson Dwight replied; "and you ought to kick us out, the last one of us."

"Oh, it isn't so bad at night like this, when trade's over, but it is sort o' embarrassing during the day. Why, what do you think? A Bradstreet commercial reporter was in the other day to get a statement of my standing, and while he was here Keith Gordon—look at him now, the scamp! holding his cards over his head; that's a bluff. I'll bet he hasn't got a ten-spot. While that agent was here Keith and a lot more of your gang were back there on the platform dancing a hoe-down. The dust was so thick you couldn't see the windows. The reporter looked surprised, but he didn't say anything. I told him I thought I'd be able to pay for all I bought in market, and that I had no idea how much I was worth. I haven't invoiced my stock in ten years. When I run low I manage to replenish somehow, and so it goes on from year to year."

"Well, I am going to talk to the boys," Dwight said. "They are taking advantage of your good-nature. The whole truth is they consider you one of them, Jim. Marrying didn't change you. You are as full of devilment as any of the rest, and they know it, and love to hang around you."

"Well, I reckon that's a fact," Blackburn answered, "and I believe I'd rather you wouldn't mention it. I think a sight of the gang, and I wouldn't hurt their feelings for the world. After all, what does it matter? Life is short, and if Trundle & Hodgson are getting more mountain custom than I am, I'll bet I get the biggest slice of life. They'll die

rich, but, like as not, friendless. By-the-way, I see your partner coming across the street. I forgot to tell you; he was looking for you a few minutes ago. You had a streak of luck when you joined issues with him; Bill Garner's a rough sort o' chap, but he is by all odds the brainiest lawyer in Georgia to-day."

At this juncture a man of medium stature, with a massive head crowned by a shock of reddish hair, a smooth-shaven, freckled face, and small feet and hands stood in the doorway. He wore a long black broadcloth coat, a waistcoat of the same material, and baggy gray trousers. The exposed portion of his shirt-front and the lapels of his coat were stained by tobacco juice.

"I've been up to the den, over to the Club, and the Lord only knows where else looking for you," he said to his partner, as he advanced, leaned against a showcase on the counter, and stretched out his arms behind him.

"Work for us, eh?" Carson smiled.

"No; since when have you ever done a lick after dark?" was the dry reply. "I've come to give you a piece of advice, and I'm glad Blackburn is here to join me. The truth is, Dan Willis is in town. He is full and loaded for bear. He's down at the wagon-yard with a gang of his mountain pals. Some meddling person—no doubt your beautiful political opponent Wiggin—has told him what you said about the part he took in the mob that raided negrotown."

"Well, he doesn't deny it, does he?" Dwight asked, his eyes flashing.

"I don't know whether he does or not," said

Garner. "But I know he's the most reckless and dangerous man in the county, and when he is drunk he will halt at nothing. I thought I'd advise you to avoid him."

"Avoid him? You mean to say"—Dwight stood up in his anger—"that I, a free-born American citizen, must sneak around in my own home to avoid a man that puts on a white mask and sheet and with fifty others like himself steals into town and nearly thrashes the life out of a lot of banjo-picking negroes? Most of them were good-for-nothing, lazy scamps, but they were born that way, and there was one in the bunch that I know was harmless. Oh yes, I got mad about it, and I talked plainly, I know, but I couldn't help it."

"You *could* have helped it," Garner said, testily; "and you ought to have protected your own interests better than to give Wiggin such a strong pull over you. If you are elected it will be by the aid of that very mob and their kin and friends. We may be able to smooth it all over, but if you have an open row with Dan Willis to-night, the cause of it will spread like wildfire, and burn votes for you in wads and bunches. Good God, man, the idea of giving Wiggin a torch like that to wave in the face of your constituency—you, a *town* man, standing up for the black criminal brutes that are plotting to pull down the white race! I say that's the way Wiggin and Dan Willis would interpret your platform."

"I can't help it," Dwight repeated, more calmly, though his voice shook with suppressed feeling as he went on. "If I lose all I hope for politically—and this seems like the best chance I'll ever have to get

to the legislature — I'll stand by my convictions. We must have law and order among ourselves if we expect to teach such things to poor, half-witted black people. I was mad that night. You know that I love the South. Its blood is my blood. Three of my mother's brothers and two of my father's died fighting for the 'Lost Cause,' and my father was under fire from the beginning of the war to the end. In fact, it is my love for the South, and all that is good and pure and noble in it, that made my blood boil that night. I saw a part of it you didn't see."

"What was that?" Garner asked.

"It was a clear moonlight night," Dwight went on. "I was sitting at the window of my room at home, looking out over Major Warren's yard, when the first screams and shouts came from the negro quarter. I suspected what it was, for I'd heard of the threats the mountaineers had made against that part of town, but I wasn't prepared for what I actually saw. The cottage of old Uncle Lewis and Mammy Linda is just behind the Major's house, you know, and in plain view of my window. I saw the old pair come to the door and run out into the yard, and then I heard Linda's voice. 'It's my child!' she screamed. 'They are killing him!' Uncle Lewis tried to quiet her, but she stood there wringing her hands and sobbing and praying. The Major raised the window of his room and looked out, and I heard him ask what was wrong. Uncle Lewis tried to explain, but his voice could not be heard above his wife's cries. A few minutes later Pete came running down the street. They had let him go. His clothes were torn to strips and his back was livid with great

whelks. He had no sooner reached the old folks than he keeled over in a faint. The Major came down, and he and I bent over the boy and finally restored him to consciousness. Major Warren was the maddest man I ever saw, and a mob a hundred strong couldn't have touched the negro and left him alive."

"I know, that was all bad enough," Garner admitted, "but antagonizing those men now won't better the matter and may do you more political damage than you'll get over in a lifetime. You can't be a politician and a preacher both; they don't go together. You can't dispute that the negro quarter of this town was a disgrace to a civilized community before the White Caps raided it. Look at it now. There never was such a change. It is as quiet as a Philadelphia graveyard."

"It's the way they went about it that made me mad," Carson Dwight retorted. "Besides, I know that boy. He is as harmless as a kitten, and he only hung around those dives because he loved to sing and dance with the rest. I *did* get mad; I'm mad yet. My people never lashed their slaves when they were in bondage; why should I stand by and see them beaten now by men who never owned negroes and never loved or understood them? Before the war a white man would stand up and protect his slaves; why shouldn't he now take up for at least the most faithful of their descendants?"

"That's it," Blackburn spoke up, admiringly. "You are a chip off of the old block, Carson. Your daddy would have shot any man who tried to whip one of his negroes. You can't help the way you feel; but I agree with Bill here, you can't get the support

of mountain people if you don't, at least, *pretend* to see things their way."

"Well, I can't see *this* thing their way," fumed Dwight; "and I'm not going to try. When I saw that old black man and woman that awful night with their very heart-strings torn and bleeding, and remembered that they had been kind to my mother when she was at the point of death—sitting by her bedside all night long as patiently as blocks of stone, and shedding tears of joy at the break of day when the doctor said the crisis had passed—when I think of that and admit that I stand by with folded hands and see their only child beaten till he is insensible, my blood boils with utter shame. It has burned a great lesson into my brain, and that is that we have got to have law and order among ourselves if we expect to keep the good opinion of the world at large."

"I understand Pete would have got off much easier if he hadn't fought them like a tiger," said Blackburn. "They say—"

"And why *shouldn't* he have fought?" Carson asked, quickly. "The nearer the brute creation a man is the more he'll fight. A tame dog will fight if you drive him into a corner and strike him hard enough."

"Well, you busted up our game," joined in Keith Gordon, who had left the table in the rear and now came forward, accompanied by another young man, Wade Tingle, the editor of the *Headlight*. "Wade and I both agree, Carson, that you've got to handle Dan Willis cautiously. We are backing you tooth and toe-nail in this campaign, but you'll tie our

hands if you antagonize the mountain element. Wiggin knows that, and he is working it for all it's worth."

"That's right, old man," the editor joined in, earnestly. "I may as well be plain with you. I'm making a big issue out of my support of you, but if you make the country people mad they will stop taking my paper. I can't live without their patronage, and I simply can't back you if you don't stick to *me*."

"I wasn't raising a row," the young candidate said. "But Garner came to me just now, actually advising me to avoid that dirty scoundrel. I won't dodge any blustering bully who is going about threatening what he will do to me when he meets me face to face. I want your support, but I can't buy it that way."

"Well," Garner said, grimly, more to the others than to his partner, "there will be a row right here inside of ten minutes. I see that now. Willis has heard certain things Carson has said about the part he took in that raid, and he is looking for trouble. Carson isn't in the mood to take back anything, and a fool can see how it will end."

II

KEITH GORDON and Tingle motioned to Garner, and the three stepped out on the sidewalk leaving Blackburn and the candidate together. The street was quite deserted. Only a few of the ramshackle street lights were burning, though the night was cloudy, the location of the stores, barber-shop, hotel, and post-office being indicated by the oblong patches of light on the ground in front of them.

"You'll never be able to move him," Keith Gordon said, stroking his blond mustache nervously. "The truth is, he's terribly worked up over it. Between us three, boys, Carson never loved but one woman in his life, and she's Helen Warren. Mam' Linda is her old nurse, and Carson knows when she comes home and hears of Pete's trouble it is going to hurt her awfully. Helen has a good, kind heart, and she loves Linda as if they were the same flesh and blood. If Carson meets Willis to-night he'll kill him or get killed. Say, boys, he's too fine a fellow for that sort of thing right on the eve of his election. What the devil can we do?"

"Oh, I see; there's a woman at the bottom of it," Garner said, cynically. "I'm not surprised at the way he's acting now, but I thought that case was over

with. Why, I heard she was engaged to a man down where she's visiting."

"She really may be," Gordon admitted, but Carson is ready to fight her battles, anyway. I honestly think she turned him down when he was rolling so high with her brother, just before his death a year ago, but that didn't alter his feelings towards her."

Garner grunted as he thrust his hand deep into his breast-pocket for his plug of tobacco and began to twist off a corner of it. "The most maddening thing on earth," he said, "is to have a close friend who is a darned fool. I'm tired of the whole business. Old Dwight is out of all patience with Carson for the reckless way he has been living, but the old man is really carried away with pride over the boy's political chances. He had that sort of ambition himself in his early life, and he likes to see his son go in for it. He was powerfully tickled the other day when I told him Carson was going in on the biggest wave of popularity that ever bore a human chip, but he will cuss a blue streak when the returns come in, for I tell you, boys, if Carson has a row with Dan Willis to-night over this negro business, it will knock him higher than a kite."

"Do you know whether Carson has anything to shoot with?" Tingle asked, thoughtfully.

"Oh yes, I saw the bulge of it under his coat just now," Garner answered, still angrily," and if the two come together it will be raining lead for a while in the old town."

"I was just thinking about his sick mother," Keith Gordon remarked. "My sister told me the other day that Mrs. Dwight was in such a low con-

dition that any sudden shock would be apt to kill her. A thing like this would upset her terribly—that is, if there is really any shooting. Don't you suppose if we were to remind Carson of her condition that he might agree to go home?"

"No, you don't know him as well as I do," Garner said, firmly. "It would only make him madder. The more reasons we give him for avoiding Willis the more stubborn he'll be. I guess we'll have to let him sit there and make a target of himself."

Just then a tall mountaineer, under a broad-brimmed soft hat, wearing a cotton checked shirt and jean trousers passed through the light of the entrance to the hotel near by and slouched through the intervening darkness towards them.

"It's Pole Baker," said Keith. "He's a rough-and-ready supporter of Carson's. Say, hold on, Pole!"

"Hold on yourself; what's up?" the mountaineer asked, with a laugh. "Plottin' agin the whites?"

"We want to ask you if you've seen Dan Willis to-night," Garner questioned.

"Have I?" Baker grunted. "That's exactly why I'm lookin' fer you town dudes instead o' goin' on out home where I belong. I'm as sober as an empty keg, but I git charged with bein' in the Darley calaboose every time I don't answer the old lady's roll-call at bed-time. You bet Willis is loaded fer bear, and he's got some bad men with him down at the wagon-yard. Wiggin has filled 'em up with a lot o' stuff about what Carson said concernin' the White Cap raid t'other night. I thought I'd sorter put you fellers on, so you could keep our man out

o' the way till their liquor wears off. Besides, I'm here to tell you, Bill Garner, that's a nasty card Wiggin's set afloat in the mountains. He says a regular gang of blue-bloods has been organized here to take up fer town coons agin the pore whites in the country. We might crush such a report in time, you know, but we'll never kill it if thar's a fight over it to-night."

"That's the trouble," the others said, in a breath.

"Wait one minute—you stay right here," Baker said, and he went and stood in front of the store door and looked in for a moment; then he came back. "I thought maybe he'd let us all talk sense to 'im, but you can't put reason into a man like that any easier than you can dip up melted butter with a hot awl. I can't see any chance unless you fellers will leave it entirely to me."

"Leave it to you?" Garner exclaimed. "What could you do?"

"I don't know whether I could do a blessed thing or not, boys, but the darn thing is so desperate that I'm willin' to try. You see, I never talk my politics —if I do, I talk it on t'other side to see what I kin pick up to advantage. The truth is, I think them skunks consider me a Wiggin man, and I'd like to git a whack at 'em. Maybe I can git 'em to leave town. Abe Johnson is the leader of 'em, and he never gets too drunk to have some natural caution."

"Well, it certainly couldn't do any harm for you to try, Pole," said Tingle.

"Well, I'll go down to the wagon-yard and see if they are still hanging about.

As he approached the place in question, which was

an open space about one hundred yards square surrounded by a high fence, at the lower end of the main street, Pole stood in the broad gateway and surveyed the numerous camp-fires which gleamed out from the darkness. He finally descried a group of men around a fire between two white-hooded wagons to the wheels of which were haltered several horses. As Pole advanced towards them, paying cheerful greetings to various men and women around the different fires he had to pass, he recognized Dan Willis, Abe Johnson, and several others.

A quart whiskey flask, nearly empty, stood on the ground in the light of the fire round which the men were seated. As he approached they all looked up and nodded and muttered careless greetings. It seemed to suggest a movement on the part of Dan Willis, a tall man of thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, who wore long, matted hair and had bushy eyebrows and a sweeping mustache, for, taking up the flask, he rose and dropped it into his coat-pocket and spoke to the two men who sat on either side of Abe Johnson.

"Come on," he growled, "I want to talk to you. I don't care whether you join us or not, Abe."

"Well, I'm out of it," replied Johnson. "I've talked to you fellows till I'm sick. You are too darned full to have any sense."

Willis and the two men walked off together and stood behind one of the wagons. Their voices, muffled by the effects of whiskey, came back to the ears of the remaining two.

"Goin' out home to-night, Abe?" Baker asked, carelessly.

"I want to, but I don't like to leave that damned fool here in the condition he's in. He'll either commit murder or git his blasted head shot off."

"That's exactly what *I* was thinking about," said Pole, sitting down on the ground carelessly and drawing his knees up in the embrace of his strong arms. "Look here, Abe, me'n you hain't to say quite as intimate as own brothers born of the same mammy, but I hain't got nothin' agin you of a personal nature."

"Oh, I reckon that's all right," the other said, stroking his round, smooth-shaven face with a dogged sweep of his brawny hand. "That's all right, Pole."

"Well, my family knowed yore family long through the war," Abe. "My daddy was with yourn at the front, an' our mothers swapped sugar an' coffee in them hard times, an', Abe, I'm here to tell you I sorter hate to see an unsuspectin' neighbor like you walk blind into serious trouble, great big trouble, Abe—trouble of the sort that would make a man's wife an' childern lie awake many and many a night."

"What the hell you mean?" Johnson asked, picking up his ears.

"Why, it's this here devilment that's brewin' betwixt Dan an' Carson Dwight."

"Well, what's that got to do with *me?*" Johnson asked, in surly surprise.

"Well, it's jest this, Abe," Pole leaned back till his feet rose from the ground, and he twisted his neck as his eyes followed the three men who, with their heads close together, had moved a little farther away. "Maybe you don't know it, Abe, but I used to be in

"'WHY, IT'S THIS HERE DEVILMENT THAT'S BREWIN' BETWIXT DAN AN' CARSON DWIGHT'"

THE NEW YORK

the government revenue service, and in one way and another that's neither here nor there I sometimes drop onto underground information, an' I want to give you a valuable tip. I want to start you to thinkin'. You'll admit, I reckon, that if them two men meet to-night thar will be apt to be blood shed."

Johnson stared over the camp-fire sullenly. "If Carson Dwight hain't had the sense to git out o' town thar will be, an' plenty of it," he said, with a dry chuckle.

"Well, thar's the difficulty," said Pole. "He hain't left town, an' what's wuss than that, his friends hain't been able to budge 'im from his seat in Blackburn's store, whar Dan couldn't miss 'im ef he was stalkin' about blindfolded. He's heard threats, and he's as mad a man as ever pulled hair."

"Well, what the devil—"

"Hold on, Abe. Now, I'll tell you whar *you* come in. My underground information is that the Grand Jury is hard at work to git the facts about that White Cap raid. The whole thing—name of leader and members of the gang has been kept close so far, but—"

"Well"—the half-defiant look in the face of Johnson gave way to one of growing alarm—"well!" he repeated, but went no further.

"It's this way, Abe—an' I'm here as a friend, I reckon. You know as well as I do that if thar is blood shed to-night it will git into court, and a lots about the White Cap raid, and matters even further back, will be pulled into the light."

Pole's words had made a marked impression on

the man to whom they had been so adroitly directed. Johnson leaned forward nervously. "So you think—" But he hung fire again.

"Huh, I think you'd better git Dan Willis out o' this town, Abe, an' inside o' five minutes, ef you can do it."

Johnson drew a breath of evident relief. "I can do it, Pole, and I'll act by your advice," he said. "Thar's only one thing on earth that would turn Dan towards home, but I happen to know what that is. He's b'ilin' hot, but he ain't any more anxious to stir up the Grand Jury than some of the rest of us. I'll go talk to 'im."

As Johnson moved away, Pole Baker rose and slouched off in the darkness in the direction of the straggling lights along the main street. At the gate he paused and waited, his eyes on the wagons and camp-fire he had just left. Presently he noticed something and chuckled. The horses, with clanking trace-chains, passed between him and the fire—they were being led round to be hitched to the wagons. Pole chuckled again. "I'm not sech a dern fool as I look," he said. "Well, I had to lie some and act a part that sorter went agin the grain, but my scheme worked. If I ever git to hell I reckon it will be through tryin' to do right—in the main."

III

THE wide avenue which ran north and south and cut the town of Darley into halves held the best and oldest residences. One side of the street caught the full rays of the morning sun and the other the slanting red beams of the afternoon. For so small a town, it was a well-graded and well-kept thoroughfare. Strips of grass lay like ribbons between the sidewalks and the roadway, and at the triangular spaces created by the intersection of certain streets there were rusty iron fences built primarily to protect diminutive fountains which had long since ceased to play. In one of these little parks, in the heart of the town, as it was in the hearts of the inhabitants, stood a monument erected to "The Confederate Dead," a well-modelled, life-size figure of a Southern private wrought in stone in faraway Italy. Had it been correctly placed on its pedestal?—that was the question anxiously asked by reverent passers-by, for the cloaked and knapsacked figure, which time was turning gray, stood with its back to the enemy's country.

"Yes, it is right," some would say, "for the soldier is represented as being on night picket-duty in Northern territory, and his thoughts and eyes are with his dear ones at home and the country he is defending."

Henry Dwight, the wealthy sire of the aggressive young man with whom the foregoing chapters have principally dealt, lived in one of the moss and ivy grown houses on the eastern side of the avenue. It was a red brick structure two and a half stories high, with a colonial veranda, and had a square, white-windowed cupola as the apex of the slanting roof. There was a semicircular drive, which entered the grounds at one corner in the front and swept gracefully past the door. The central and smaller front gate, for the use of pedestrians, with its imitation stone posts, spanned by a white crescent, was reached from the house by a gravelled walk bordered by boxwood. On the right and left were rustic summer-houses, grape arbors and parterres containing roses and other flowers, all of which were well cared for by an old colored gardener.

Henry Dwight was a grain and cotton merchant, money-lender, and the president and chief stockholder of the Darley Cotton Mills, whose great brick buildings and cottages for employés stood a mile or so to the west of the town. This morning, having written his daily letters, he was strolling in his grounds smoking a cigar. To any one who knew him well it would have been plain that his mind was disturbed.

Adjoining the Dwight homestead there was another ancestral house equally as spacious and standing in quite as extensive, if more neglected, grounds. It was here that Major Warren lived, and it happened that he, too, was on his lawn just beyond the ramshackle intervening fence, the gate of which had fallen from its hinges and been taken away.

The Major was a short, slight old gentleman, quite a contrast to the John Bull type of his lusty, side-whiskered neighbor. He wore a dingy brown wig, and as he pottered about, raising a rose from the earth with his gold-headed ebony stick, or stooped to uproot an encroaching weed, his furtive glance was often levelled on old Dwight.

"I declare I really might as well," he muttered, undecidedly. "What's the use making up your mind to a thing and letting it go for no sensible reason. He's taking a wrong view of it. I can tell that by the way he puffs at his cigar. Yes, I'll do it."

The Major passed through the gateway and slowly drew near his preoccupied neighbor.

"Good-morning, Henry," he said, as Dwight looked up. "If I'm any judge of your twists and turns, you are not yet in a thoroughly good-humor."

"Good-humor? No, sir, I'm *not* in a good-humor. How could I be when that young scamp, the only heir to my name and effects—"

Dwight's spleen rose and choked out his words, and, red in the face, he stood panting, unable to go further.

"Well, it seems to me, while he's not *my* son," the Major began, "that you are—are—well, rather overbearing—I might say unforgiving. He's been sowing wild oats, but, really, if I am any judge of young men, he is on a fair road to—to genuine manhood."

"Road to nothing," spluttered Dwight. "I gave him that big farm to see what he could do in its management. Never expected him to work a lick—

just wanted to see if he could keep it on a paying basis, but it was an investment of dead capital. Then he took up the law. He did a little better at that along with Bill Garner to lean on, but that never amounted to anything worth mentioning. Then he went into politics."

"And I heard you say yourself, Henry," the Major ventured, gently, "that you believed he was actually cut out for a future statesman."

"Yes, and like the fool that I was I hoped for it. I was so glad to see him really interested in politics that I laid awake at night thinking of his success. I heard of his popularity on every hand. Men came to me, and women, too, telling me they loved him and were going to work for him against that jack-leg lawyer Wiggin, and put him into office with a majority that would ring all over the State; and they meant it, I reckon. But what did he do? In his stubborn, bull-headed way he abused those mountain men who took the law into their hands for the public good, and turned hundreds of them against him; and all for a nigger—a lazy, trifling nigger boy!"

"Well, you see," Major Warren began, lamely, "Carson and I saw Pete the night he was whipped so severely and we took pity on him. They played together when they were boys, as boys all over the South do, you know, and then he saw Mam' Linda break down over it and saw old Lewis crying for the first time in the old man's life. I was mad, Henry, myself, and you would have been if you had been there. I could have fought the men who did it, so I understand how Carson felt, and when he made the

remark Wiggin is using to such deadly injury to his prospects my heart warmed to the boy. If he doesn't succeed as a politician it will be because he is too genuine for a tricky career of that sort. His friends are trying to get him to make some statement that will reinstate him with the mountain people who sympathized with the White Caps, but he simply won't do it."

"Won't do it! I reckon not!" Dwight blurted out. "Didn't the young idiot wait in Blackburn's store for Dan Willis to come and shoot the top of his head off? He sat there till past midnight, and wouldn't move an inch till actual proof was brought to him that Willis had left town. Oh, I'm no fool! I know a thing or two. I've watched him and your daughter together. That's at the bottom of it. She sat down on him before she went off to Augusta, but her refusal didn't alter him. He knows Helen thinks a lot of her old negro mammy, and in her absence he simply took up her cause and is fighting mad about it—so mad that he is blind to his political ruin. That's what a man will do for a woman. They say she's about to become engaged down there. I hope she is, and that Carson will have pride enough when he hears of it to let another man do her fighting, and one with nothing to lose by it."

"She hasn't written me a thing about any engagement," the Major answered, with some animation; "but my sister highly approves of the match and writes that it may come about. Mr. Sanders is a well-to-do, honorable man of good birth and education. Helen never seemed to get over her brother's

sad death. She loved poor Albert more than she ever did me or any one else."

"And I always thought that it was Carson's association with your son in his dissipation that turned Helen against him. For all I know, she may have thought Carson actually led Albert on and was partly the cause of his sad end."

"She may have looked at it that way," the Major said, musingly. They had now reached the porch in the rear of the house and they went together into the wide hall. A colored maid with a red bandanna tied like a turban round her head was dusting the walnut railing of the stairs. Passing through the hall, the old gentlemen turned into the library, a great square room with wide windows and tall, gilt-framed pier-glass mirrors.

"Yes, I'm sure that's what turned her against him," Dwight continued, "and that is where, between you and Helen, I get mixed up. Why do you always take up for the scamp? It looks to me like you'd resent the way he acted with your son after the boy's terrible end."

"There is a good deal more in the matter, Henry, than I ever told you about." Major Warren's voice faltered. "To be plain, that is my secret trouble. I reckon if Helen was to discover the actual truth—*all of it*—she would never feel the same towards me. I think maybe I ought to tell you. It certainly will explain why I am so much interested in your boy."

They sat down, the owner of the house in a reclining-chair at an oblong, carved mahogany table covered with books and papers, the visitor on a lounge near by.

"Well, it always has seemed odd to me," old Dwight said. "I couldn't exactly believe you wanted to bring him and Helen together, after your experience with that sort of man under your own roof."

"It is this way," said the Major, awkwardly. "To begin with, I am sure, from all I've picked up, that it was not your son that was leading mine on to dissipation, but just the other way. He's dead and gone, but Albert was always ready for a prank of any sort. Henry, I want to talk to you about it because it seems to me you are in the same position in regard to Carson that I was in regard to my poor boy, and I've prayed a thousand times for pardon for what I did in anger and haste. Henry, listen to me. If ever a man made a vital mistake I did, and I'll bear the weight of it to my grave. You know how I worried over Albert's drinking and his general conduct. Time after time he made promises that he would turn over a new leaf only to break them. Well, it was on the last trip—the fatal one to New York, where he had gone and thrown away so much money. I wrote him a severe letter, and in answer to it I got a pathetic one, saying he was sick and tired of the way he was doing and begging me to try him once more and send him money to pay his way home. It was the same old sort of promise and I didn't have faith in him. I was unfair, unjust to my only son. I wrote and refused, telling him that I could not trust him any more. Hell inspired that letter, Henry—the devil whispered to me that I'd been indulgent to the poor boy's injury. Then came the news. When he was found dead in a small room on

the top floor of that squalid hotel—dead by his own hand—my letter lay open beside him."

"Well, well, you couldn't help it!" Dwight said, most awkwardly, and he crossed his short, fat legs anew and reached for an open box of cigars. "You were trying to do your duty as you saw it, and to the best of your ability."

"Yes, but my method, Henry, resulted in misery and grief to me and Helen that can never be cured. You see, it is because of that awful mistake that I take such an interest in Carson. I love him because Albert loved him, and because sometimes it seems to me that you are most too quick to condemn him. Oh, he's different! Carson has changed wonderfully since Albert died. He doesn't drink to excess now, and Garner says he has quit playing cards, having only one aim, and that to win this political race—to win it to please you, Henry."

"Win it!" Dwight sniffed. "He's already as dead as a salt mackerel—laid out stiff and stark by his own bull-headed stupidity. I've always talked down drinking and card-playing, but I have known some men to succeed in life who had such habits in moderation; but you nor I nor no one else ever saw a blockhead succeed at anything. I tell you he'll never make a successful politician. Wiggin will beat the hind sights off of him. Wiggin is simply making capital of the fool's inability to control his temper and sympathies. Wiggin would have let that mob thrash his own father and mother rather than antagonize them and lose their votes. He knows Carson comes of fighting stock, and he will continue to egg Dan Willis and others on, knowing that every

resentful word from Carson will make enemies for him by the score."

"Oh, I can see that, too!" the Major sighed; "but, to save me, I can't help admiring the boy. He thinks the White Caps did wrong that night and he simply can't pretend otherwise. It is the principle of the thing, Henry. He is an unusual sort of candidate, and his stand may ruin his chances, but I—I glory in his firmness. I must say that."

"Oh yes, that's the trouble with you sentimental people," Dwight fumed. "Between you and the boy's doting mother, the Lord only knows where he'll land. I've overlooked a lot in him in the hope that he'd put this election through, but I shall let him go his own way now. It has come to a pretty pass if I have to see my son beaten to the dust by a man of Wiggin's stamp because of that long-legged negro boy of yours who would have been better long ago if he had been soundly thrashed."

When his visitor had gone Dwight dropped his unfinished cigar into the grate and went slowly upstairs to his wife's room. At a small-paned window overlooking the flower-garden, on a couch supported in a reclining position by several puffy pillows, was Mrs. Dwight. She was well past middle-age and of extremely delicate physique. Her hair was snowy white, her skin thin to transparency, her veins full and blue.

"That was Major Warren, wasn't it?" she asked, in a soft, sweet voice, as she put down the magazine she had been reading.

"Yes," Dwight answered, as he went to a little desk in one corner of the room and took a

paper from a pigeon-hole and put it into his pocket.

"How did he happen to come over so early?" the lady pursued.

"Because he wanted to, I reckon," Dwight started out, impatiently, and then a note of caution came into his voice as he remembered the warning of the family physician against causing the patient even the slightest worry. "Warren hasn't a blessed thing to do, you know, from morn till night. So when he strikes a busy man he is apt to hang on to him and talk in his long-winded way about any subject that takes possession of his brain. He's great on showing men how to manage their own affairs. It takes an idle man to do that. If that man hadn't had money left to him he would now be begging his bread from door to door."

"Somehow I fancied it was about Carson," Mrs. Dwight sighed.

"There you go!" her husband said, with as much grace of evasion as lay in his sturdy compound. "Lying there from day to day, you seem to have contracted Warren's complaint. You think nobody can drop in even for a minute without coming about your boy—your boy! Some day, if you live long enough, you may discover that the universe was not created solely for your son, nor made just to revolve around him either."

"Yes, I suppose I *do* worry about Carson a great deal," the invalid admitted; "but you haven't told me right out that the Major was *not* speaking of him."

The old man's face was the playground of con-

flicting impulses. He grew red with anger and his lips trembled on the very verge of an outburst, but he controlled himself. In fact, his irritability calmed down as he suddenly saw a loop-hole through which to escape her questioning.

"The truth is," he said, "Warren was talking about Albert's death. He talked quite a while about it. He almost broke down."

"Well, I'm so worried about Carson's campaign that I imagine all sorts of trouble," Mrs. Dwight sighed. "I lay awake nearly all of last night thinking about one little thing. When he was in his room dressing the other day, I heard something fall to the floor. Hilda had taken him some hot water for shaving, and when she came back she told me he had dropped his revolver out of his pocket. You know till then I had had no idea he carried one, and while it may be necessary at times, the idea is very disagreeable."

"You needn't let *that* bother you," Dwight said, as he took his hat to go down to his office at his warehouse. "Nearly all the young men carry them because they think it looks smart. Most of them would run like a scared dog if they saw one pointed at them even in fun."

"Well, I hope my boy will never have any use for one," the invalid said. "He is not of a quarrelsome nature. It takes a good deal to make him angry, but when he gets so he is not easily controlled."

IV

THE young men in Carson Dwight's set had an odd sort of lounging-place. It was Keith Gordon's room above his father's bank in an old building which had withstood the shot and shell of the Civil War. "The Den," as it was called by its numerous hap-hazard occupants, was reached from the street on the outside by a narrow flight of worm-eaten and rickety stairs and a perilous little balcony or passage that clung to the brick wall, twenty feet from the ground, along the full length of the building. It was here in one of the four beds that Keith slept, when there was room for him. After a big dance or a match game of baseball, when there were impecunious visitors from neighboring towns left over for various and sundry reasons, Keith had to seek the sanctimonious solitude of his father's home or go to the hotel.

The den was about twenty-five feet square. It was not as luxurious as such bachelor quarters went in Augusta, Savannah, or even Atlanta, but it answered the purpose of "the gang" which made use of it. Keith frankly declared that he had overhauled and replenished it for the last time. He said that it was absolutely impossible to keep wash-basins and pitchers, when they were hurled out of

the windows for pure amusement of men who didn't care whether they washed or not. As for the laundry bill, he happened to know that it was larger than that of the Johnston House or the boarding department of the Darley Female College. He said, too, that he had warned the gang for the last time that the room would be closed if any more clog-dancing were indulged in. He said his father complained that the plastering was dropping down on his desk below, and sensible men ought to know that a thing like that could not go on forever.

The rules concerning the payment for drinks were certainly lax. No accounts were kept of any man's indebtedness. Any member of the gang was at liberty to stow away a flask of any size in the bureau or washstand drawer, or under the mattresses or pillows of his or anybody else's bed, where Skelt, the negro who swept the room, and loved stimulants, could not find it.

Bill Garner, as brainy as he was, while he was always welcome at his father's house in the country, a mile from town, seemed to love the company of this noisy set. Through the day it was said of him that he could read and saturate himself with more law than any man in the State, but at night his recreation was a cheap cigar, his old bulging carpet slippers, a cosey chair in Keith's room, and—who would think it?—the most thrilling Indian dime novel on the market. He could quote the French, German, Italian, and Spanish classics by the page in a strange musical accent he had acquired without the aid of a master or any sort of intercourse with native foreigners. He knew and loved all things

pertaining to great literature—said he had a natural ear for Wagner's music, had comprehended Edwin Booth's finest work, knew a good picture when he saw it; and yet he had to have his dime novel. In it he found mental rest and relaxation that was supplied by nothing else. His bedfellow was Bob Smith, the genial, dapper, ever daintily clad clerk at the Johnston House. Garner said he liked to sleep with Bob because Bob never—sleeping or waking—took anything out of him mentally. Besides dressing to perfection, Bob played rag-time on the guitar and sang the favorite coon songs of the day. His duties at the hotel were far from arduous, and so the gang usually looked to him to arrange dances and collect toll for expenses. And Bob was not without his actual monetary value, as the proprietor of the hotel had long since discovered, for when Bob arranged a dance it meant that various socially inclined drummers of good birth and standing would, at a hint or a telegram from the clerk, "lay over" at Darley for one night anyway.

If Bob had any quality that disturbed the surface of his uniform equanimity it was his excessive pride in Carson Dwight's friendship. He interlarded his talk with what Carson had said or done, and Carson's candidacy for the Legislature had become his paramount ambition. Indeed, it may as well be stated that the rest of the gang had espoused Dwight's political cause with equal enthusiasm.

It was the Sunday morning following the night Pole Baker had prevented the meeting between Dwight and Dan Willis, and most of the habitual loungers were present waiting for Skelt to black

their boots, and deploring the turn of affairs which looked so bad for their favorite. Wade Tingle was shaving at one of the windows before a mirror in a cracked mahogany frame, when they all recognized Carson's step on the balcony and a moment later Dwight stood in the doorway.

"Hello, boys, how goes it?" he asked.

"Oh, right side up, old man," Tingle replied, as he began to rub the lather into his face with his hand to soften his week-old beard before shaving. "How's the race?"

"It's all right, I guess," Dwight said, wearily, as he came in and sat down in a vacant chair against the wall. "How goes it in the mountains? I understand you've been over there."

"Yes, trying to rake in some ads, stir up my local correspondents, and take subscriptions. As to your progress, old man, I'm sorry to say Wiggin's given it a sort of black eye. There was a meeting of farmers over in the tenth, at Miller's Spring. I was blamed sorry you were not there. Wiggin made a speech. It was a corker—viewed as campaign material solely. That chap's failed at the law, but he's the sharpest, most unprincipled manipulator of men's emotions I ever ran across. He showed you up as Sam Jones does the ring-tailed monster of the cloven foot."

"What Carson said about the Willis and Johnson mob was his theme, of course?" said Garner, above the dog-eared pages of his thriller.

"That and ten thousand things Carson never dreamed of," returned Tingle. "Here's the way it went. The meeting was held under a bush-arbor to

keep the sun off, and the farmers had their wives and children out for a picnic. A long-faced parson led in prayer, some of the old maids piped up with a song that would have ripped slits in your musical tympanum, Garner, and then a raw-boned ploughman in a hickory shirt and one gallus introduced the guest of honor. How they could have overlooked the editor-in-chief and proprietor of the greatest agricultural weekly in north Georgia and picked out that skunk was a riddle to me."

"Well, what did he say?" Garner asked, as sharply as if he were cross-examining a non-committal witness of importance.

"What did he say?" Tingle laughed, as he wiped the lather from his face with a ragged towel and stood with it in his hand. "He began by saying that he had gone into the race to win, and that he was going to the Legislature as sure as the sun was on its way down in this country and on its way up in China. He said it was a scientific certainty, as easily demonstrated as two and two make four. Those hardy, horny-handed men before him that day were not going to the polls and vote for a town dude who parted his hair in the middle, wore spike-toed shoes that glittered like a new dash-board, and was the ringleader of the rowdiest set of young card-players and whiskey-drinkers that ever blackened the morals of a mining-camp. He said that about the gang, boys, and I didn't have a thing to shoot with. In fact, I had to sit there and take in more."

"What did he say about his *platform?*" Garner asked, with a heavy frown; "that's what *I* want to get at. You never can hurt a politician by circulat-

ing the report that he drinks—that's what half of 'em vote for."

"Oh, his platform seemed to be chiefly that he was out to save the common people from the eternal disgrace of voting for a man like Dwight. He certainly piled it on thick and heavy. It would have made Carson's own mother slink away in shame. Carson, Wiggin said, had loved niggers since he was knee high to a duck, and had always contended that a negro owned by the aristocracy of the South was ahead of the white, razor-back stock in the mountains who had never had that advantage. Carson was up in arms against the White Caps that had come to Darley and whipped those lazy coons, and was going to prosecute every man in the bunch to the full extent of the United States law. If he got into the Legislature he intended to pass laws to make it a penitentiary offence for a white man to shove a black buck off the sidewalk. 'But he's not going to take his seat in the Capitol of Georgia,' Wiggins said, with a yell—'if Carson Dwight went to Atlanta it would *not* be on a free pass.' And, boys, that crowd yelled till the dry leaves overhead clapped an encore. The men yelled and the women and children yelled."

"He's a contemptible puppy!" Dwight said, angrily.

"Yes, but he's a slick politician among men of that sort," said Tingle. "He certainly knows how to talk and stir up strife."

"And I suppose you sat there like a bump on a log, and listened to all that without opening your mouth!" Keith Gordon spoke up from his bed, where he lay in his bath-robe smoking over the remains of

the breakfast Skelt had brought from the hotel on a big black tray.

"Well, I *did*—get up," Tingle answered, with a manly flush.

"Oh, you *did!*" Garner leaned forward with interest.

"Well, I'm glad you happened to be on hand, for your paper has considerable influence over there."

"Yes, I got up. I waved my hands up and down like a buzzard rising, to keep the crowd still till I could think of something to say; but, Carson, old man, you know what an idiot I used to be in college debates. I could get through fairly well on anything they would let me write down and read off, but it was the impromptu thing that always rattled me. I was as mad as hell when I rose, but all those staring eyes calmed me wonderfully. I reckon I stood there fully half a minute swallowing—"

"You damned fool!" Garner exclaimed, in high disgust.

"Yes, that's exactly what I was," Tingle admitted. "I stood there gasping like a catfish enjoying his first excursion in open air. It was deathly still. I've heard it said that dying men notice the smallest things about them. I remember I saw the horses and mules haltered out under the trees with their hay and fodder under their noses—the dinner-baskets all in a cluster at the spring guarded by a negro woman. Then what do you think? Old Jeff Condon spoke up.

"'Lead us in prayer, brother,' he said, in reverential tones, and since I was born I never heard so much laughing."

"You certainly *did* play into Wiggin's hands,"

growled the disgruntled Garner. "That's exactly what a glib-tongued skunk like him would want."

"Well, it gave me a minute to try to get my wind, anyway," said Tingle, still red in the face, but I wasn't equal to a mob of baseball rooters like that. I started in to deny some of Wiggin's charges when another smart Alec spoke up and said: 'Hold on! tell us about the time you and your candidate started home from a ball at Catoosa Springs in a buggy, and were so drunk that the horse took you to the house of a man who used to own him sixteen miles from where you wanted to go. Of course, you all know, boys, that was a big exaggeration, but I had no idea it was generally known. Anyway, I thought the crowd would laugh their heads off. I reckon it was the way I looked. I felt as if every man, woman, and child there had mashed a bad egg on me and was chuckling over their marksmanship. I ended up by getting mad, and I saw by Wiggin's grin that he liked that. I managed to say a few things in denial, and then Wiggin got up and roasted me and my paper to a turn. He said that in supporting Dwight editorially the *Headlight* was giving sanction to Dwight's ideas in favor of the negro and against honest white people, and that every man there who had any family or State pride ought to stop taking the dirty sheet; and, bless your life, some of them did cancel their subscriptions when they met me after the speaking; but I'm going to keep on mailing it, anyway. It will be like sending free tracts to the heathen, but it may bear fruit."

V

HALF an hour later all the young men had left the room except Garner and Dwight. Garner still wore the frown brought to his broad brow by Tingle's recital.

"I've set my heart on putting this thing through," he said; "and while it looks kind of shaky, I haven't lost all hope yet. Of course, your reckless remarks about the White Caps have considerably damaged us in the mountains, but we may live it down. It may die a natural death if you and Dan Willis don't meet and plug away at each other and set the talk afloat again. I reckon he'll keep out of your way when he's sober, anyway."

"I am not running after him," Carson returned. "I simply said what I thought and Wiggin made the most of it."

Garner was silent for several minutes, then he folded his dime novel and bent it across his knee, and when he finally spoke Dwight thought he had never seen a graver look on the strong face. He had seen it full of emotional tears when Garner was at the height of earnest appeal to a jury in a murder case; he had seen it dark with the fury of unjust legal defeat, but now there was a strange feminine whiteness at the corners of the big facile mouth, a queer twitching of the lips.

"I've made up my mind to tell you a secret," he said, falteringly. "I've come near it several times and backed out. It's a subject I don't know how to handle. It's about a woman, Carson. You know I'm not a ladies' man. I don't call on women; I don't take them buggy-riding; I don't dance with them, or even know how to fire soft things at them like you and Keith, but I've had my experience."

"It certainly is a surprise to me," Dwight said, sympathetically, and then in the shadow of Garner's seriousness he found himself unable to make further comment.

"I reckon you'll lose all respect for me for thinking there was a ghost of a chance in that particular quarter," Garner pursued, without meeting his companion's eye. "But, Carson, my boy, there is a certain woman that every man who knows her has loved or is still loving. Keith's crazy about her, though he has given up all hope as I did long ago, and even poor Bob Smith thinks he's in luck if she will only listen to one of his new songs or let him do her some favor. We all love her, Carson, because she is so sweet and kind to us—"

"You mean—" Dwight interrupted, impulsively, and then lapsed into silence, an awkward flush rising to his brow.

"Yes, I mean Helen Warren, old man. As I say, I had never thought of a woman that way in my life. We were thrown together once at a house-party at Hilburn's farm—well, I simply went daft. She never refused to walk with me when I asked her, and seemed specially interested in my profession. I didn't know it at the time, but I have since dis-

covered that she has that sweet way with every man, rich or poor, married or single. Well, to make a long story short, I proposed to her. The whole thing is stamped on my brain as with a branding-iron. We had taken a long walk that morning and were seated under a big beech-tree near a spring. She kept asking about my profession, her face beaming, and it all went to my head. I knew that I was the ugliest man in the State, that I had no style about me, and knew nothing about being nice to women of her sort; but her interest in everything pertaining to the law made me think, you know, that she admired that kind of thing. I went wild. As I told her how I felt I actually cried. Think of it—I was silly enough to blubber like a baby! I can't describe what happened. She was shocked and pained beyond description. She had never dreamed that I felt that way. I ended by asking her to try to forget it all, and we had a long, awful walk to the house."

"That *was* tough," Carson Dwight said, a queer expression on his face.

"Well, I've told it to you for a special reason," Garner said, with a big, trembling sigh. "Carson, I am a close observer, and I afterwards made up my mind that I knew why she had led me on to talk so much about the law and my work in particular."

"Oh, you found that out!" Carson said, almost absently.

"Yes, my boy, it was about the time you and I were thinking of going in together. It was all on your account."

Carson stared straight at Garner. "*My* account? Oh no!"

"Yes, on your account. I've kept it from you all this time. I'm your friend now in full—to the very bone, but at that time I felt too sore to tell you. I'd lost all I cared for on earth, but I simply had too much of primitive man left in me to let you know how well you stood. My God, Carson, about that time I used to sit at my desk behind some old book pretending to read, but just looking at you as you sat at work wondering how it would feel to have what was yours. Then I watched you both together; you seemed actually made for each other, an ideal couple. Then came your—she refused you."

"I know, I know, but why talk about it, Garner?" Carson had risen and stood in the doorway in the rays of the morning sun. There was silence for a moment. The church bells were ringing and negroes and whites were passing along the street below.

"It may be good for me to speak of it and be done with it, or it may not," said Garner; "but this is what I was coming to. I've said it was a long time before I could tell you that she was once—I don't know how she is now, but she was at one time in love with you."

"Oh no, no, she was never that!" Dwight said. "We were great friends, but she never cared that much for me or for any one,"

"Well, it was a long time before I could say what I thought about that, and I have only just now taken another step in self-renunciation. Carson, I can now say that you didn't have a fair deal, and that I have reached a point in which I want to see you get it. I think I know why she refused you."

"You do?" Dwight said, pale and excited, as he

came away from the door and leaned heavily against the wall near his friend.

"Yes, it was this way. I've studied it all out. She loved Albert as few women love their brothers, and his grim end was an almost unbearable shock. After his death, you know it leaked out that you had been Albert's constant companion through his dissipation, almost, in fact, up to the very end. She couldn't reconcile herself to your part, innocent as it was, in the tragedy, and it simply killed the feeling she had for you. I suppose it is natural to a character as strong as hers."

"I've always feared that—that was the reason," said Dwight, falteringly, as he went back to the door and looked out. There was a droop of utter dejection on him and his face seemed to have aged. "Garner," he said, suddenly, "there is no use denying anything. You have admitted your love for her, why should I deny mine? I never cared for any other woman and I never shall."

"That's right, but you didn't get a fair deal, all the same," said Garner. "She's never looked for any sort of justification in your conduct; her poor brother's death stands like a draped wall between you, but I know you were not as black as you were painted. Carson, all the time you were keeping pace with Albert Warren you were blind to the gulf ahead of him and were simply glorying in his friendship—*because he was her brother.* Ah, I know that feeling!"

Carson was silent, while Garner's gray eyes rested on him for a moment full of conviction, and then he nodded. "Yes, I think that was it. It was my ruination, but I could not get away from the fascina-

tion of his companionship. He fairly worshipped her and used to talk of her constantly when we were together, and he—he sometimes told me things she kept back. He knew how I felt. I told him. Through him I seemed to be closer to her. But when the news came that he was dead, and when I met her at the funeral at the church, and caught her eye, I saw her shrink back in abhorrence. She wouldn't go out with me ever again after that, and was never exactly the same."

"That was two years ago, my boy," Garner said, significantly, "and your character has changed. You are a better, firmer man. In fact, it seems to me that your change dates from Albert Warren's death. But now I'm coming to the thing that prompted me to say all this. I met Major Warren in the post-office this morning. He was greatly excited. Carson, she has just written him that she is coming home for a long stay and the old gentleman is simply wild with delight."

"Oh, she's coming, then!" Dwight exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, and Keith and Bob and the rest of her adorers will go crazy over the news and want to celebrate it. I didn't tell them. I wanted you to know it first. There is one other thing. You know you can't tell whether there is anything in an idle report, but the gossips say she has perhaps met her fate down there. I've even heard his name—one Earle Sanders, a well-to-do cotton merchant of good standing in the business world. But I'll never believe she's engaged to him till the cards are out."

"I really think it may be true," Carson Dwight

said, a firm, set expression about his lips. "I've heard of him. He's a man of fine character and intellect. Yes, it may be true, Garner."

"Well," and Garner drew himself up and folded his arms, "if it should happen to be so, Carson, there would be only one thing to do, and that would be to grin and bear it."

"Yes, that would be the only thing," Dwight made answer. "She has a right to happiness, and it would have been wrong for her to have tied herself to me, when I was what I was, and when I am still as great a failure as I am."

He turned suddenly out onto the passage, and Garner heard his resounding tread as he walked away.

"Poor old chap," Garner mused, as he leaned forward and looked at the threadbare toes of his slippers, "if he weathers this storm he'll make a man right—if not, he'll go down with the great majority, the motley throng meant for God only knows what purpose."

VI

THE Warren homestead was in a turmoil of excitement over Helen's return. The ex-slaves of the family for miles around had assembled to celebrate the occasion in quite the ante-bellum fashion. The men and grown boys sat about the front lawn and on the steps of the long veranda and talked of the day Helen was born, of her childhood, of her beauty and numerous conquests away from them, and of the bare possibility of her deigning to accept the hand of some one of her powerful and wealthy suitors.

In her own chamber, a great square room with many windows, Helen, tall, graceful, with light-brown eyes and almost golden hair, was receiving the women and girls. She had brought a present suitable for each of them, as they knew she would, and the general rejoicing was equal to that of an old-time Georgia Christmas.

"You are all here," Helen smiled, as she looked about the room, "except Mam' Linda. Is she not well?"

"Yessum, she's well as common," Jennie, a yellow house-maid, said, "as well as she been since Pete had dat scrimmage wid de White Caps. Missie, you gwine notice er gre't change in Mam' Lindy. Since

dat turrible night, while she seem strong in de body, she looks powerful weak in de face en sperit. Unc' Lewis is worried about 'er. She des set in er cottage do' en rock back an' fo'th all day long. You done heard 'bout dat lambastin', 'ain't you, Missie?"

"Yes, my father wrote me about it," Helen replied, an expression of sympathetic pain on her well-featured face, "but he didn't tell me that mammy was taking it so hard."

"He was tryin' ter keep you fum worryin'," Jennie said, observantly. "Marster knowed how much sto' you set by yo' old mammy. He was de maddest man you ever laid eyes on dat night, but he couldn't do nothin', fer it was all over, en dem white trash done skedaddle back whar dey come fum."

"And was Pete so much to blame?" Helen asked, her voice shaking.

"Blame fer de company he been keepin', Missie—dat's all; but what you gwine ter do wid er strappin' young nigger growin' up? It des like it was in de old day fo' de war. De niggers had to have deir places ter meet an' cut up shines. Dey been done too much of it at Ike Bowen's. De white folks dat lived round dar couldn't sleep at night. It was one long shindig or a fist-cuff scrap fum supper till daylight."

"Well, I wish Mam' Linda would come to see me," Helen said. "I'm anxious about her. If she isn't here soon I'll go to her."

"She's comin' right on, Missie," another negro girl said, "but she tol' Unc' Lewis she was gwine ter wait till we all cleared out. She say you her baby,

en she ain't gwine ter be bothered wid so many, when she see you de fust time after so long."

"That's exactly like her," Helen smiled. "Well, you all must go now, and, Jennie, tell her I am dying to see her."

The room was soon cleared of its chattering and laughing throng, and Linda, supported by her husband, a stalwart mulatto, came from her cottage behind the house and went up to Helen's room. She was short, rather portly, about half white, and for that reason had a remarkably intelligent face which bore the marks of a strong character. Entering the room, after sharply enjoining her husband to wait for her in the hall, she went straight up to Helen and laid her hand on the young lady's head.

"So I got my baby back once mo'," she said, tenderly.

"Yes, I couldn't stay away, Mammy," Helen said, with an indulgent smile. "After all, home is the sweetest place on earth—but you mustn't stand up; get a chair."

The old woman obeyed, slowly placing the chair near that of her mistress and sitting down. "I'm glad you got back, honey," she said. "I loves all my white folks, but you is my baby, en I never could talk to de rest of um lak I kin ter you. Oh, honey, yo' old mammy has had lots en lots er trouble!"

"I know, Mammy, father wrote me about it, and I've heard more since I got here. I know how you love Pete."

Linda folded her arms on her breast and leaned forward till her elbows rested on her knees. Helen

saw a wave of emotion shake her whole body as she straightened up and faced her with eyes that seemed melting in grief. "Honey," she said, "folks said when de law come en give we all freedom dat de good day was at hand. It was ter be a time er plenty en joy fer black folks; but, honey, never while I was er slave did I had ter suffer what I'm goin' thoo now. In de old time marster looked after us; de lash never was laid on de back er one o' his niggers. No white pusson never dared to hit one of us, en yit now in dis day er glorious freedom, er whole gang of um come in de dead er night en tied my child wid ropes en tuck turn about lashin' 'im. Honey, sometimes I think dey ain't no Gawd fer a pusson wid one single streak er black blood in 'im. Ef dey is er Gawd fer sech es me, why do He let me pass thoo what been put on me? I heard dat boy's cryin' half er mile, honey, en stood in de flo' er my house en couldn't move, listenin' en listenin' ter his screams en dat lash fallin' on 'im. Den dey let 'im loose en he come runnin' erlong de street ter find me—ter find his mammy, honey—his mammy who couldn't do nothin' fer 'im. En dar right at my feet he fell over in er faint. I thought he was dead en never would open his eyes ergin."

"And I wasn't here to comfort you!" Helen said, in a tearful tone of self-reproach. "You were alone through it all."

"No, I wasn't, honey. Thank de Lawd, dar is some er de right kind er white folks left. Marse Carson Dwight heard it all fum his room en come over. He raised Pete up en tuck 'im in an' laid 'im on de baid. He tuck 'im up in his arms, honey,

young marster did, en set to work to bring 'im to. An' after de po' boy was easy en ersleep en de doctor gone off, Marse Carson come ter me en tuck my hand. 'Mam' Lindy,' he said, es pale as ef he'd been sick er long time, 'dis night's work has give me some'n' ter think erbout. De best white men in de Souf won't stan' fer dis. Sech things cayn't go on forever. Ef I go to de Legislature I'll see dat dey gwine ter pass laws ter pertect you faithful old folks."

"Carson said that?" Helen's voice was husky, her glance averted.

"Yes, en he was dead in earnest, honey; he wasn't des talkin' ter comfort me. I know, kase I done hear suppen else dat happened since den."

"What was that?" Helen asked.

"Why, dey say dat Marse Carson went straight down-town en tried ter find somebody dat was in de mob. He heard Dan Willis was among 'em—you know who he is, honey. He's er bad, desp'rate moonshine man. Well, Marse Carson spoke his mind about 'im, an' dared 'im out in de open. Unc' Lewis said Mr. Garner an' all Marse Carson's friends tried to stop 'im, kase it would go dead agin 'im in his 'lection, but Marse Carson wouldn't take back er word, en was so mad he couldn't hold in. En dat another hard thing to bear, honey," Linda went on. "Des think, Marse Carson cayn't even try to help er po' old woman lak me widout ruinin' his own chances."

"Is it as serious as that?" Helen asked, with deep concern.

"Yes, honey, he never kin win his race lessen he act diffunt. Dey say dat man Wiggin is laughin'

fit ter kill hisse'f over de way he got de upper hold. I told Marse Carson des t'other day he mustn't do dat way, but he laughed in my face in de sweet way he always did have. 'Ef dey vote ergin me fer dat, Mam' Lindy,' he say, 'deir votes won't be worth much.' Marse Carson is sho got high principle, honey. His pa think he ain't worth much, but *he's* all right. You mark my words, he's gwine ter make a gre't big man—he gwine ter do dat kase he's got er tender heart in 'im, an ain't afeard of anything dat walk on de yeath. He may lose dis one 'lection, but he'll not stop. I know young white men, thoo en thoo, en I never yit seen er better one."

"Have you—have you seen him recently?" Helen asked, surprised at the catch in her voice.

"Oh yes, honey," the old woman said, plaintively; seem lak he know how I'm sufferin', en he been comin' over often en talkin' ter me'n Lewis. Seem lak he's so sad, honey, here late. Ain't you seed 'im yit, honey?"

"No, he hasn't been over," Helen replied, rather awkwardly. "He will come, though; he and I are good friends."

"You gwine find 'im changed er lot, honey," the old woman said. "Do you know, I don't believe he ever got over Marse Albert's death. He warn't ter blame 'bout dat, honey, dough I do believe he feel dat way. Seem lak we never kin fetch up Marse Albert's name widout Marse Carson git sad. One night here late when Lewis was talkin' 'bout when yo' pa went off en fetched young master home, Marse Carson hung his head en say: 'Mam' Lindy, I wish dat time could be go over ergin. I would act so

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diffunt. I never seed whar all dem scrapes was leadin' to. But it learned me a lesson, Mam' Lindy.'"

"That's it," Helen said, bitterly, as if to herself; "he survived. He has profited by the calamity, but my poor, dear brother—" She went no further, for her voice broke and her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't think erbout dat, honey," old Linda said, consolingly. "You got yo' one great trouble lak I has, but you is at home wid we all now, en you must not be sad."

"I don't intend to be, Mammy," Helen said, wiping her eyes on her handkerchief. "We are going to try to do something to keep Pete out of trouble. Father thinks it is his associates that are to blame. We must try in future to keep him away from bad company."

"Dat what I want ter do, honey," the old woman said, "en ef I des had somewhar ter send 'im so he could be away fum dis town I'd be powerful glad."

VII

AS Helen anticipated, the young ladies of the town, her most intimate friends and former school-mates, came in a body that afternoon to see her. The reception formally opened in the great parlor down-stairs, but it was not many minutes before they all found themselves in Helen's chamber fluttering about and chattering like doves in their spring plumage.

"There's no use putting it off longer," Ida Tarpley, Helen's cousin, laughed; "they are all bent on seeing your *things*, and they will simply spend the night here if you don't get them out."

"Oh, I think that would look so vain and silly in me," Helen protested, her color rising. "I don't like to exhibit my wardrobe as if I were a dress-maker, or a society woman who is hard up and trying to dispose of them."

"The idea of your not doing it, dear," Mary King, a little blonde, said, "when not one of us has seen a decent dress or hat since the summer visitors went away last fall."

"Leave it to me," Ida Tarpley laughed. "You girls get off the bed. I want something to lay them on. If it were only evening I'd make her put on that gown she wore at the Governor's ball. You

remember what the *Constitution's* society reporter said about it. He said it was a poet's dream. If I ever get one it will be *in* a dream. You must really wear it to your dance, Helen."

"*My* dance?" Helen said, in surprise.

"Oh, I hope I'm not telling secrets," Ida said; "but I met Keith Gordon and Bob Smith in town as I came on. They had a list and were taking subscriptions from all the young men. They had already enough put down to buy a house and lot. They say they are going to give you the swellest dance that was ever heard of. Bob said that it simply had to surpass anything you'd been to in Augusta or Atlanta. Expense is not to be considered. The finest band in Chattanooga has already been engaged; the refreshments are to be brought from there by a caterer and a dozen expert waiters. A carload of flowers have been ordered. It is to open with a grand march." Ida swung her hands and body comically to and fro as if in the cake walk, and bowed low. "Nobody is to be allowed to dance with you who hasn't an evening suit on, and *then* only once. They are all crazy about you, Helen. I never could understand it. I've tried to copy the look you have in the eyes hundreds of times, but it won't have the slightest effect."

"There's only one explanation of it," Miss Wimberley, another girl, remarked; "it is simply because she really likes them all."

"Well, I really do, as for that," Helen said; "and I think it is awfully nice of them to give me such a dance. It's enough to turn a girl's head. Well,

if Ida really is going to pull out my things, I'll go down-stairs and make you a lemonade."

Later in the afternoon the young ladies had all gone except Ida Tarpley, who lingered with Helen on the veranda.

"I'm glad the girls didn't have the bad taste to embarrass you by questioning you about Mr. Sanders," Ida said. "Of course, it is all over town. Uncle spoke of the possibility of it to some one and that put it afloat. I'm anxious to see him, Helen. I know he must be nice—everything, in fact, that a man ought to be, for you always had high ideals."

Helen flushed almost angrily, and she drew herself erect and stood quite rigid, looking at her cousin.

"Ida," she said, "I don't like what you have just said."

"Oh, dearest, I'm sorry, but I thought—"

"That's the trouble about a small town," Helen went on. "People take such liberties with you, and about the most delicate things. Down in Augusta my friends never would think of saying I was actually engaged to a man till it was announced. But here at home it is in every mouth before they have even seen the gentleman in question."

"But you really have been receiving constant attentions from Mr. Sanders for more than a year, haven't you, dear?" Miss Tarpley asked, blandly.

"Yes, but what of that?" Helen retorted. "He and I are splendid friends. He has been very kind and thoughtful of my comfort, and I like him. He is noble, sincere, and good. He extended the sweetest sympathy to me when I went down there under

my great grief, and I never can forget it, but, nevertheless, Ida, I have not promised to marry him."

"Oh, I see, it is not actually settled yet," Miss Tarpley said. "Well, I'm glad. I'm very, very glad."

"You are glad?" Helen said, wonderingly.

"Yes, I am. I'm glad because I don't want you to go away off down there and marry a stranger to us. I really hope something will break it up. I know Mr. Sanders must be awfully fond of you—any man would be who had a ghost of a chance of winning you—and I know your aunt has been doing all in her power to bring the match about—but I understand you, dear, and I am afraid you would not be happy."

"Why do you say that so—so positively?" Helen asked, coldly.

"Because," Ida said, impulsively, "I don't believe a girl of your disposition ever could love in the right way more than once, and—"

"And what?" Helen demanded, her proud lips compressed, her eyes flashing defiantly.

"Well, I may be wrong, dear," Miss Tarpley went on, "but if you were not actually in love before you went to Augusta, you were very near it."

"How absurd!" Helen exclaimed, with a little angry toss of her head.

"Do you remember the night our set drove out to the Henderson party? I went with Mr. Garner and Carson Dwight took you? Oh, Helen, I met you and Carson walking together in the moonlight that evening under the apple-trees in the old meadow, and if ever a pair of human beings really

loved each other you two must have done so that night. I saw it in his happy, triumphant face, and in the fact, Helen dear, that you allowed him to be with you so much, when you knew other admirers were waiting to see you."

Helen looked down; her face was clouded over, her proud lip twitched.

"Ida," she said, tremulously, "I don't want you ever again to mention Carson Dwight's name to me in—in that way. You have no right to."

"Yes, I have," Ida protested, firmly. "I have the right as a loyal friend to the best, most suffering, and noblest young man I ever knew. I read you like a book, dear. You really cared very, very much for Carson once, but after your great loss you never thought the same of him again."

"No, nor I never shall," Helen said, firmly. "I admire him and shall treat him as a good friend when we meet, but that will be the end of it. Whether I cared for him or not, as girls care for young men, is neither here nor there. It is over with."

"And all simply because he was a little wild at the time your poor brother—"

"Stop!" Helen said; "don't argue the matter. I can only now associate him with the darkest hour of my life. I'm tempted to tell you something, Ida," and Helen bowed her head for a moment, and then went on in an unsteady voice. "When my poor brother's trunk was brought home, it was my duty to put the things it contained in order. There I found some letters to him, and one dated only two days before Albert's death was from—from Carson Dwight. I read only a portion of it, but it revealed

a page in poor Albert's life that I had never read—never dreamed could be possible."

"But Carson," Ida Tarpley exclaimed; "what did *he* have to do with that?"

Helen swallowed the lump in her throat, and with a cold, steely gleam in her eyes she said, bitterly:

"He could have held out his hand with the superior strength you think he has and drawn the poor boy back from the brink, but he didn't. The words he wrote about it were light, flippant, and heartless. He treated the whole awful situation as a joke, as if —as if he *himself* were familiar with such unmentionable things."

"Ah, I begin to understand it all now!" Ida sighed. "That letter, coupled with Cousin Albert's awful death, was such a terrible shock that you cannot feel the same towards Carson. But oh, Helen, you would pity him if you knew him now as I do. He has never altered in his feelings towards you. In fact, it seems to me that he loves you even more deeply than ever. And, dear, if you had seen his patient efforts to make a better man of himself you'd not harbor such thoughts against him. You will understand Carson some day, but it may then be too late. I don't believe a woman ever has a real sweetheart but once. You may marry the man your aunt wants you to take, but your heart will some day turn back to the other. You will remember, too, and bitterly, that you condemned him for a youthful fault which you ought to have pardoned."

"Do you think so, Ida?" Helen asked, her soft, brown eyes averted.

"Yes, and you'll remember, too, that while his

other friends were trying to help him stick to his resolutions you turned against him. He's going to make a great and good man, Helen. I've known that for some time. He is having his troubles, but even they will help him to be stronger in the end. His greatest trial is going on right now, while folks are saying that you are going to marry another man. Pshaw! you may say what you like about Mr. Sanders' good qualities, but I know I shall not like him," concluded Ida, with a smile, as she turned to go. "He is a usurper, and I'm dead against him."

Helen remained on the veranda after her cousin had left till the twilight gathered about her. She was about to go in, as it was near tea-time, when she heard a grumbling voice down the street and saw old Uncle Lewis returning from town, driving his son, the troublesome Peter, before him.

"You go right thoo dat gate on back ter dat house, you black imp er 'straction!" he thundered, "er I'll tek er boa'd en lambast de life out'n you. Here it is night-time en you ain't chop no stove-wood fer de big house kitchen, en been lyin' roun' dem cotton wagons raisin' mo' rows wid dem mountain white men."

"What's the matter, Uncle Lewis?" Helen asked, as the boy sulkily passed round the corner of the house and the old man, out of breath, paused at the steps.

"Oh, Missy, you don't know what me 'n' Mam' Lindy got to bear up under. We don't know how ter manage dat boy. Lindy right now is out'n 'er head wid worry. Buck Black come tol' us 'bout an hour ago dat Pete en some mo' triflin' niggers was down

at de warehouse sassin' some mountain white men. Buck heard Pete say dat Johnson en his gang couldn't whip him ergin dout gittin' in trouble, en dey was in er inch of er big row when de marshal busted it up. Buck ain't no fool, fer a black man, Missy, en he told me 'n' Lindy ef we don't manage ter git Pete out'n de company he keeps dat dem white men will sho string 'im up."

"Yes, something has to be done, that's plain," said Helen, sympathetically. "I know Mam' Linda must be worrying, and I'll go down to see her this evening. It doesn't seem to me that a town like this is best for a boy like Pete. I'll speak to father about it, Uncle Lewis. It won't do to have Mammy bothered like this. It will kill her. She is not strong enough to stand it."

"Oh, Missy," the old man said, "I wish you would try ter do some'n'. Me 'n' Lindy is sho at de end er our rope."

"Well, I promise you I'll do all I can, Uncle Lewis," Helen said, and, much relieved, the old negro trudged homeward.

VIII

A LOCAL institution in which "the gang" was more or less interested was known as the "Darley Club." It occupied the entire upper floor of a considerable building on the main street, and had been organized, primarily, by the older married men of the town to give the young men of the best families a better meeting-place than the bar-rooms and offices of the hotels. At first the older men looked in occasionally to see that the rather rigid rules of the institution were being kept. But men of middle-age and past, who have comfortable firesides, are not fond of the noisy gatherings of their original prototypes, and the Club was soon left to the management of the permanent president, Mr. Wade Tingle, editor of the *Headlight*.

Wade endeavored, to the best of his genial nature, to enforce all rules, collect all dues, and impose all fines, but he wasn't really the man for the place. He accepted what cash was handed to him, trying to remember the names of the payers and amounts as he wrote his editorials, political notes, and social gossip, ending up at the end of each month with no money at all to pay the rent or the wages of the negro factotum. However, there was always an outlet from this embarrassment, for Wade had only

to draw a long face as he met some of the well-to-do stay-at-homes and say that "club expenses were somehow running short," and without question the shortage was made up. Wade had tried to be officially stern, too, on occasion. Once when Keith Gordon had violated what Wade termed club discipline, not to say club etiquette, Wade threatened to be severe. But it happened to be a point upon which there was a division of opinion, and Keith also belonged to "the gang." It had happened this way: Keith had a certain corner in the Club reading-room where he was wont to write his letters of an evening, and coming down after supper one night he discovered that the attendant had locked the door and gone off to supper. Keith was justly angry. He stood at the door for a few minutes, and then, being something of an athlete, he stepped back, made a run the width of the sidewalk, and broke the lock, left the door hanging on a single hinge, and went up and calmly wrote his letters. As has been intimated, Wade took a serious view of this violation of club dignity, his main contention being that Keith ought to have the lock repaired and the hinge replaced. However, Keith just as firmly stood on his rights, his contention being that a member of the Club in good standing could not be withheld from his rights by the mere carelessness of a negro or a twenty-five cent cast-iron lock. So it was that, in commemoration of the incident, the door remained without the lock and hinge for many a day.

It was in this building that the grand ball in honor of Helen Warren's home-coming was to be given. During the entire preceding day Bob Smith and

Keith Gordon worked like happy slaves. The floor had been roughened by roller-skating, and a carpenter with plane and sand-paper was smoothing it, Bob giving it its finishing touch by whittling sperm candles over it and rubbing in the shavings with the soles of his shoes as he pirouetted about, his right arm curved around an imaginary waist. The billiard-tables were pushed back against the wall, the ladies' dressing-rooms thoroughly scoured and put in order, and the lamps cleaned and trimmed. Keith had brought down from his home some fine oil-paintings, and these were hung appropriately. But Keith's *chef-d'œuvre* of arrangement and decoration was a happy inspiration, and he was enjoining it on the initiated ones to keep it as a surprise for Helen. He had once heard her say that her favorite flower was the wild daisy, and as they were now in bloom, and grew in profusion in the fields around the town, Keith had ordered several wagon-loads of them gathered, and now the walls of the ballroom were fairly covered with them. Graceful festoons of the flowers hung from the ceiling, draped the doorways, and rose in beautiful mounds on the white-clothed refreshment-tables.

As a special favor he admitted Carson Dwight in at the carefully guarded door at dusk on the evening of the ball, first drawing down the blinds and lighting the candles and lamps that his chum might have the full benefit of the scene as it would strike Helen on her arrival.

"Isn't that simply superb?" he asked. "Do you reckon they gave her anything prettier while she was down there? I don't believe it, Carson. I

think this is the dandiest room a girl ever tripped a toe in."

"Yes, it's all right," Dwight said, admiringly. "It is really great, and she will appreciate it keenly. She is that way."

"I think so myself," said Keith. "I've been nervous all day, though, old man. I've been watching every train."

"Afraid the band wouldn't come?" asked Dwight.

"No, those coons can be depended on; they will be down in full force with the best figure-caller in the South. No, I was afraid, though, that Helen might have written to that Augusta chump, and that he would come up. That certainly would give the thing cold feet."

"Ah!" Carson exclaimed; "I see."

"The dear girl wouldn't rub it in on us to that extent, old man," Keith said. "I know it now. She really may be engaged to him, and she may not, but she knows how we feel, and it's bully of her not to invite him. It would really have been a wet blanket to the whole business. We'd have to treat him decently, as a visitor, you know, but I'd rather have taken castor-oil for my part of it. All the gang except you were over to see her Sunday afternoon; why didn't you go?"

"Oh, you know I live only next door, with an open gate between, and I thought I'd better give my place to you fellows who don't have my opportunity. I've already seen her. In fact, she ran over to see my mother yesterday."

The ball was in full swing when Carson arrived that night. The street in front of the club was

crowded with carriages, buggies, and livery-stable "hacks." The introductory grand march was in progress, and when Carson went to the improvised dressing-room in charge of Skelt to check his hat he found Garner standing before a mirror tugging at the lapels of an evening coat and trying to adjust a necktie which kept climbing higher than it should. Darley was just at the point in its post-bellum struggle where evening dress for men was a thing more of the luxurious past than the stern present, and Dwight readily saw that his partner had persuaded himself for once to don borrowed plumage.

"What's the matter?" Carson asked, as he thrust his hat-check into the pocket of his immaculate white waistcoat.

"Oh, the damn thing don't fit!" said Garner, in high disgust. "I know now that my father has a hump, or did have when he ordered this suit for his wedding-trip. The tailor who designed this *costeem de swaray* tried to help him out, but he has transferred the hump to me by other means than heredity. Look how the back of it sticks out from my neck!"

"That's because you twist your body to see it in the glass," said Carson, consolingly. "It's not so bad when you stand straight."

"It's a case of not seeing others as they see you, eh?" Garner said, better satisfied. "I haven't taken a chew of tobacco to-night. I wouldn't splotch this shirt for the world. I couldn't spit farther than an inch with this collar on, anyway. She's holding the reel for me. I can't dance anything else, but I can go through that pretty well if I get at the end and watch the others. You'd better hurry up and see

her card. There is a swell gang coming on the ten-o'clock train from Atlanta, and they all know her."

It was during the interval following the third number on the programme that Carson met Helen promenading with Keith and offered her his arm.

"Oh, isn't it simply superb?" she said, when Keith had bowed himself away and they had joined the other strollers round the big, flower-perfumed room. "Carson, really I actually cried for joy just now in the dressing-room. I declare I never want to go away from home again. I'll never have such devoted friends as these."

"It is nice of you to look at it that way, Helen," he said, "after the gay time you have had in Augusta and other cities."

"At least it is honest and sincere here at home," she answered, "while down there it is—well, full of strife, social competition, and jealousies. I really got homesick and simply had to come back."

"We are simply delighted to have you again," he said, almost fearing to look upon her, for in her exquisite evening gown and the proud poise of her head she seemed more beautiful and imperious, and farther removed from his hopes than he had thought her even in the darkest hours of her first refusal to condone his fatal offence.

She was looking straight into his eyes with a thoughtful, questioning stare, when she said: "They all seem the same, Carson, except you. Bob Smith, Keith, and even Mr. Garner are just like I left them, but somehow you are altered. You look so much older, so much more serious. Is it politics that is weighing you down—making you worry?"

"Well," he laughed, evasively, "politics is not exactly the easiest game in the world, and the bare fear that I may not succeed, after all, is enough to make a fellow of my temperament worry. It seems to be my last throw of the dice, Helen. My father will lose all faith in me if this does not go through."

"Yes, I know it is serious," the girl said. "Keith and Mr. Garner have talked to me about it. They say they have never seen you so much absorbed in anything before. You really must win, Carson—you simply must!"

"But this is no time to talk over sordid politics," he said, with a smile. "This is your party and it must be made delightful."

"Oh, I have my worries, too," she said, gravely. "I felt a queer twinge of conscience to-night when all the servants came to see me before I left home. They were all so happy except Mam' Linda. She tried to act like the rest, but, Carson, her trouble about that worthless boy is actually killing the dear old woman. She has her pride, too, and it has been wounded to the quick. She was always proud of the fact that my father never had whipped one of his slaves. I've heard her boast of it a hundred times; and now that she no longer belongs to us in reality, and her only child was beaten so cruelly, she simply can't get over it."

"I knew she felt that way," Dwight said, sympathetically.

Helen's hand tightened unconsciously on his arm as they were passing by the corner containing the orchestra. "Do you know," she said, "Mam' Linda told me that of all the people who had been to see

her since then that you had been the kindest, most thoughtful, the most helpful? Carson, that was very, very sweet of you."

"I was only electioneering," he said, with a flush. "I was after Uncle Lewis's vote and Mam' Linda's influence."

"No, you were not," Helen declared. "It was pure, unadulterated unselfishness on your part. You were sorry for her and for Uncle Lewis and even Pete, who certainly needed punishment of some sort for the way he's been conducting himself. Yes, it was only your good heart. I know that, for several persons have told me you have even gone so far as to let the affair hamper you in your political career. Oh, I know all about what your opponent is saying, and I know mountain people well enough to know you have given him a powerful weapon. They are terribly wrought up over the race troubles, and it would be easy enough for them to misunderstand your exact feeling. Oh, Carson, you must not let even Mam' Linda's trouble stand between you and your high aim. Taking up her cause will perhaps not do a bit of good, for no one person can solve so vital a problem as that is, and your agitation of it may wreck your last hope."

"I've promised to keep my mouth shut, if Dan Willis and men of his sort will not stay right at my heels with their threats. My campaign managers—the gang, who hold a daily caucus at the den and lay down my rules of conduct—have exacted that much from me on the penalty of letting me go by the board if I disobey."

"The dear boys!" Helen exclaimed. "I like every

one of them, they are so loyal to you. The close friendship of you all for one another is simply beautiful."

"Coming back to the inevitable Pete," Dwight remarked, a few minutes later. "I've been watching him since he was whipped, and I know he is in great danger of getting even more deeply into trouble. He has a stupidly resentful disposition, as many of his race have, and he is going around making surly threats about Johnson, Wiggin, and others. If he keeps that up and they get hold of it he will certainly get into serious trouble."

"My father was speaking of that to-night," Helen said. "And he was thinking if there were any way of getting the boy away from his idle town associates that it might prevent trouble and ease Mam' Linda's mind."

"I was thinking of that the other day when I saw Uncle Lewis searching for him among the idle negroes," said Carson; "and I have an idea."

"Oh, you have? What is it?" Helen asked, eagerly.

"Why, Pete always has seemed to like me and take my advice, and as there is, plenty of work on my farm for such a hand as he is I could give him a good place and wages over there where he'd be practically removed from his present associates."

"Splendid, splendid!" Helen cried; "and will you do it?"

"Why, certainly, and right away," Carson answered. "If you will have Mam' Linda send him down to me in the morning I'll give him some instructions and a good sharp talk, and I'll make my overseer at the farm put him to work."

"Oh, it is splendid!" Helen declared. "It will be such good news for Mam' Linda. She'd rather have him work for you than any one in the world."

"There comes Wade to claim his dance," Dwight said, suddenly; "and I must be off."

"Where are you going?" she asked, almost regretfully.

"To the office to work on political business—dozens and dozens of letters to answer. Then I'm coming back for my waltz with you. I sha'n't fail."

And as he put on his hat and threaded his way through the whirling mass of dancers down to the street, he recalled with something of a shock that not once in their talk had he even *thought* of his rival. He slowed up in the darkness and leaned against a wall. There was a strange sinking of his heart as he faced the grim reality that stretched out drearily before him. She was, no doubt, to be the wife of another man. He had lost her. She was not for him, though there in the glare of the ballroom, amid the sensuous strains of music, in the perfume of the flowers dying in her service, she had seemed as close to him in heart, soul, and sympathy as the night he and she—

He had reached his office, a little one-story brick building in the row of lawyers' offices on the side street leading from the post-office to the court-house, and he unlocked the door and went in and lighted the little murky lamp on his desk and pulled down a package of unanswered letters.

Yes, he must work—work with that awful pain in his breast, the dry, tightening sensation in his throat, the maddening vision of her dazzling beauty and

grace and sweetness before him. He dipped his pen, drew the paper towards him, and began to write:

"MY DEAR SIR,—In receiving the cordial assurances of your support in the campaign before me, I desire to thank you most heartily and to—"

He laid the pen down and leaned back. "I can't do it, at least not to-night," he said. "Not while she is there looking like that and with my waltz to come, and yet it must be done. I've lost her, and I am only making it harder to bear. Yes, I must work—work!"

The pen went into the ink again. On the still night air came the strains of music, the mellow, sing-song voice of the figure-caller in the "square" dance, the whir and patter of many feet.

IX

LEAVING Carson Dwight, Wade Tingle, and Bob Smith chatting about the ball in the den the next morning, Garner went to the office, bit off a chew of tobacco, and plunged into work with a vigor which indicated that he was almost ashamed of his departure from his beaten track into the unusual fields of social gayety. He still wore the upright collar and white necktie of the night before, but the hitherto carefully guarded expanse of shirt-front was already in imminent danger of losing all that had once recommended it as a presentable garment.

With his small hand well spread over the page of the book he was consulting, he had become oblivious to his surroundings when suddenly a man stood in the doorway. He was tall and gaunt and wore a broad-brimmed hat, a cotton checked shirt, jean trousers supported by a raw-hide belt, and a pair of tall boots which, as he stood fiercely eying Garner, he angrily lashed with his riding-whip. It was Dan Willis. His face was slightly flushed from drink, and his eyes had the glare even his best friends had learned to fear and tried to avoid.

"Whar's that thar dude pardner o' yourn?" he asked.

"Oh, you mean Dwight!" Garner had had too much experience in the handling of men to change countenance over any sudden turn of affairs, either for or against his interests, and he had, also, acquired admirable skill in most effective temporizing. "Why, let me see, Dan," he went on, after he had paused for fully a moment, carefully inspected the lines he was reading, frowned as if not quite satisfied therewith, and then slowly turned down a leaf. "Let me think. Oh, you want to see Carson! Sit down; take a chair."

"I don't want to set down!" Willis thundered. "I want to see that damned dude, and I want to see him right off."

"Oh, that's it!" said Garner. "You are in a *hurry!*" And then, from the rigid setting of his jaw, it was plain that the lawyer had decided on the best mode of handling the specimen glowering down upon him. "Oh yes, I remember now, Willis, that you were loaded up a few nights ago looking for that chap. Now, advice is cheap—that is, the sort I'm going to give you. Under ordinary circumstances I'd charge a fee for it. My advice to you is to straddle that horse of yours and get out of this town. You are looking for trouble—great, big, far-reaching trouble."

"You hit the nail that pop, Bill Garner," the mountaineer snorted. "I'm expectin' to git trouble, or *give* trouble, an' I hain't goin' to lose time nuther. This settlement was due several days ago, but got put off."

"Look here, Willis"—Garner stood up facing him—"you may not be a fool, but you are acting powerfully like one. You are letting that measly little

candidate for the legislature make a cat's-paw of you. That's what you're doing. He knows, if he can get up a shooting-scrap between you and my pardner over that negro-whipping business, it will turn a few mountain votes his way. If you get shot, Wiggin will have more charges to make; and if Carson was to get the worst of it, the boy would be clean out of the skunk's way. You and Wiggin are both in bad business."

"Well, that's *my* lookout!" the mountaineer growled, beside himself in rage. "Carson Dwight said I was with Johnson the night the gang came in and whipped them coons, and—"

"Well, you *were*," said Garner, as suddenly as if he were browbeating a witness. "What's the use to lie about it?"

"Lie—you say I—?"

"I said I didn't *want* you to lie about it," said Garner, calmly. "I know half the mob, and respect most of them. I have an idea that some of my own kinsfolk was along that night. They thought they were doing right and acting in the best interests of the community. That's neither here nor there. The men that were licked were negroes, and most of them bad ones at that, but when a big, strapping man of your stamp comes with blood in his eye and a hunk of metal on his hip, looking for the son of an old Confederate soldier, who is a Democratic candidate for the legislature, and a good all-round white citizen, why, I say that is the time to call a halt, and to call it out loud! I happen to know a few of the grand jury, and if there is trouble of a serious nature in this town to-day, I can personally testify to

enough deliberation in your voice and eye this morning to jerk your neck out of joint."

"What the hell do I care for you or your law?" Dan Willis snorted. "It's what that damned dude said about *me* that he's got to swallow, and if he's in this town I'll find him. A fellow told me if he wasn't here he'd be in Keith Gordon's room. I don't know whar that is, but I kin find out."

Turning abruptly, Willis strode out into the street again.

"The devil certainly is to pay now," Garner said, with his deepest frown as he closed the law-book, thrust it back into its dusty niche in his bookcase, and put on his hat. "Carson is still up there with those boys, and that fellow may find him any minute. Carson won't take back a thing. He's as mad about the business as Willis is. I wonder if I can possibly manage to keep them apart."

On his way to the den he met Pole Baker standing on the corner of the street by a load of wood, which Pole had brought in to sell. Hurriedly, Garner explained the situation, ending by asking the farmer if he could see any way of getting Willis out of town.

"I couldn't work him myself," Baker said, "fer the dern skunk hain't any more use fer me than I have fer him, but I reckon I kin put some of his pals onto the job."

"Well, go ahead, Pole," Garner urged. "I'll run up to the room and try to detain Carson. For all you do, don't let Willis come up there."

Garner found the young men still in the den chatting about the ball and Carson's campaign.

Wade Tingle sat at the table with several sheets of

paper before him, upon which, in a big, reporter's hand, he had been writing a glowing account of "the greatest social event" in the history of the town.

"I've got a corking write-up, Bill," he said, enthusiastically. "I've just been reading it to the gang. It is immense. Miss Helen sent me a full memorandum of what the girls wore, and, for a green hand, I think I have dressed 'em up all right."

"The only criticism I made on it, Garner," spoke up Keith from his bed in the corner, where he lay fully dressed, "is that Wade has ended all of Helen's descriptions by adding, 'and diamonds.' I'll swear I'm no critic of style in writing, but that eternal 'and diamonds, and diamonds, and diamonds,' at the end of every paragraph, sounds so monotonous that it gets funny. He even had Miss Sally Ware's plain black outfit tipped off with 'and diamonds.'"

"Well, I look at it this way, Bill," Wade said, earnestly, as Garner sat down. "Of course, the girls who had them on would not like to see them left out, for they are nice things to have, and, on the other hand, those who were short in that direction would feel sorter out of it."

"I think if he had just written 'jewels' once in awhile," Keith said, "it would sound all right, and leave something to the imagination."

"That might help," Garner said, his troubled glance on Carson's rather grave face; "but see that you don't write it 'jewelry.'"

"Well, I'll accept the amendment," Wade said, as he began to scratch his manuscript and rewrite.

Carson Dwight stood up. "Did you leave the

office open?" he asked Garner. "I've got to shape up that Holcolm deed and consult the records."

"Let it go for a while. I want to look it over first," Garner said, rather suddenly. "Sit down. I want to talk to you about the — the race. You've got a ticklish proposition before you, old boy, and I'd like to see you put it through."

"Hear, hear!" cried Keith, sitting up on the edge of his bed. "Balls and what girls wear belong to the regular run of life, but when the chief of the gang is about to be beaten by a scoundrel who will hesitate at nothing, it's time to be wide awake."

"That's it," said Garner, his brow ruffled, his ear open to sounds without, his uneasy eyes on the group around him. And for several minutes he held them where they sat, listening to his wise and observant views of the matter in hand. Suddenly, while he was in the midst of a remark, a foot-fall sounded on the long passage without. It was heavy, loud, and striding. Garner paused, rose, went to the bureau, and from the top drawer took out a revolver he always kept either there or in his desk at the office. There was a firm whiteness about his lips which was new to his friends.

"Carson," he said, "have you got your gun?" and he stood staring at the doorway.

A shadow fell on the floor; a man entered. It was Pole Baker, and he looked around him in surprise, his inquiring stare on Garner's unwonted mien and revolver.

"Oh, it's you!" Garner exclaimed. "Ah, I thought—"

"Yes, I come to tell you that—" Baker hesitated, as if uncertain whether he was betraying confidence, and then catching Garner's warning glance, he said, non-committally: "Say, Bill, that feller you and me was talkin' about has jest gone home. I reckon you won't get yore money out of him to-day."

"Oh, well, it was a small matter, anyway, Pole," Garner said, in a tone of appreciative relief, as he put the revolver back in the drawer and closed it. "I'll mention it to him the next time he's in town."

"Say, what was the matter with you just now, Garner?" Wade Tingle asked over the top of his manuscript. "I thought you were going to ask Carson to fight a duel."

But with his hand on Dwight's arm Garner was moving to the door. "Come on, let's get to work," he said, with a deep breath and a grateful side glance at Baker.

In front of the office one of Carson's farm wagons drawn by a pair of mules was standing. Tom Hillyer, Carson's overseer and general manager, sat on the seat, and behind him stood Pete Warren, ready for his stay in the country.

"Miss Helen's made quick work of it, I see," Carson remarked. "She's determined to get that rascal out of temptation."

"You ought to give him a sharp talking to," said Garner. "He's got entirely too much lip for his own good. Skelt told me this morning that if Pete doesn't dry up some of that gang will hang him before he is a month older. He doesn't know any better, and means nothing by it, but he has al-

ready made open threats against Johnson and Willis. You understand those men well enough to know that in such times as these a negro can't do that with impunity."

"I agree with you, and I'll stop and speak to him now."

When Carson came in and sat down at his desk, a few moments later, Garner looked across at him and smiled.

"You certainly let him off easy," he said. "I could have thrown a Christmas turkey down the scamp's throat through that grin of his. I saw you run your hand in your pocket and knew he was bleeding you."

"Oh, well, I reckon I'm a failure at that sort of thing," Dwight admitted, with a sheepish smile. "I started in by saying that he must not be so foolhardy as to make open threats against any of those men, and he said: 'Looky here, Marse Carson, dem white rapscallions cut gashes in my body deep enough ter plant corn in, an' I ain't gwine ter love 'em fer it. *You* wouldn't, you know you wouldn't.'"

"And he had you there," Garner said, grimly. "Well, they may say what they please up North about our great problem, but nothing but time and the good Lord can solve it. You and I can tell that negro to keep his mouth shut from sunup till sundown, but I happen to know that he had a remote white ancestor that was the proudest, hardest fighter that ever swung a sword. Some of the rampant agitators say that deportation is the only solution. Huh! if you deported a lot of full-blood blacks along

with such chaps as this one, it would be only a short time before the yellow ones would have the rest in bondage, and so history would be going backward instead of forward. I guess it's going forward right now if we only had the patience to see it that way."

X

ONE beautiful morning near the first of June, as Carson was strolling on the upper veranda at home, waiting for the breakfast-bell, Keith Gordon came by on his horse on his way to town.

"Heard the news?" he called out, as he reined in at the gate and leaned on the neck of his mount.

"No; what's up?" Carson asked, and as he spoke he saw Helen Warren emerge from the front door of her father's house and step down among the dew-wet rose-bushes that bordered the brick walk.

"Horrible enough in all reason," Keith replied. "There's been a cold-blooded murder over near your farm. Abe Johnson, who led that mob, you know, and his wife were killed by some negro with an axe. The whole country is up in arms and crazy with excitement."

"Wait, I'll come right down," Carson said, and he disappeared into the house. And when he came out a moment later he found Helen on the sidewalk talking to Keith, and from her grave face he knew she had overheard what had been said.

"Isn't it awful?" she said to Carson, as he came out at the gate. "Of course, it is the continuation of the trouble here in town."

"How do they know a negro did it?" Carson asked,

obeying the natural tendency of a lawyer to get at the facts.

"It seems," answered Gordon, "that Mrs. Johnson lived barely long enough after the neighbors got there to say that it was done by a mulatto, as well as she could see in the darkness. In their fury, the people are roughly handling every yellow negro in the neighborhood. They say the darkies are all hiding out in the woods and mountains."

Then the conversation paused, for old Uncle Lewis, who was at work with a pair of garden-shears behind some rose-bushes close by, uttered a groan and, wide-eyed and startled, came towards them.

"It's awful, awful, awful!" they heard him say. "Oh, my Gawd, have mercy!"

"Why, Uncle Lewis, what's the matter?" Helen asked, in sudden concern and wonder over his manner and tone.

"Oh, missy, missy!" he groaned, as he shook his head despondently. "My boy over dar 'mongst 'em right now. Oh, my Lawd! I know what dem white folks gwine ter say fust thing, kase Pete didn't had no mo' sense 'an ter—"

"Stop, Lewis!" Carson said, sharply. "Don't be the first to implicate your own son in a matter as serious as this is."

"I ain't, marster!" the old man groaned, "but I know dem white folks done it 'fo' dis."

"I'm afraid you are right, Lewis," Keith said, sympathetically. "He may be absolutely innocent, but, since his trouble with that mob, Pete has really talked too much. Well, I must be going."

As Keith was riding away, old Lewis, muttering

softly to himself and groaning, turned towards the house.

"Where are you going?" Helen called out, as she still lingered beside Carson.

"I'm gwine try to keep Linda fum hearin' it right now," he said. "Ef Pete git in it, missy, it gwine ter kill yo' old mammy."

"I'm afraid it will," Helen said. "Do what you can, Uncle Lewis. I'll be down to see her in a moment."

As the old man tottered away, Helen looked up and caught Carson's troubled glance.

"I wish I were a man," she said.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because I'd take a strong stand here in the South for law and order at any cost. We have a good example in this very thing of what our condition means. Pete may be innocent, and no doubt is, for I don't believe he would do a thing like that no matter what the provocation, and yet he hasn't any sort of chance to prove it."

"You are right," Carson said. "At such a time they would lynch him, if for nothing else than that he had dared to threaten the murdered man."

"Poor, poor old mammy!" sighed Helen. "Oh, it is awful to think of what she will suffer if—if—Carson, do you really think Pete is in actual danger?"

Dwight hesitated for a moment, and then he met her stare frankly.

"We may as well face the truth and be done with it," he said. "No negro will be safe over there now, and Pete, I am sorry to say, least of all."

"If he is guilty he may run away," she said, shortsightedly.

"If he's guilty we don't *want* him to get away," Carson said, firmly. "But I really don't think he had anything to do with it."

Helen sighed. They had stepped back to the open gate, and there they paused side by side. "How discouraging life is!" she said. ` "Carson, in planning to get Pete over there, you and I were acting on our purest, noblest impulses, and yet the outcome of our efforts may be the gravest disaster."

"Yes, it seems that way," he responded, gloomily; "but we must try to look on the bright side and hope for the best."

On parting with Helen, Carson went into the big, old-fashioned dining-room, and after hurriedly drinking a cup of coffee he went down to his office. Along the main thoroughfare, on the street corners, and in front of the stores he found little groups of men with grave faces, all discussing the tragedy. More than once in passing he heard Pete's name mentioned, and for fear of being questioned as to what he thought about it he hurried on. Garner was an early riser, and he found him at his desk writing letters.

"Well, from all accounts," Garner said, "your man Friday seems to be in a ticklish place over there, innocent or not—that is, if he hasn't had the sense to skip out."

"Somehow, I don't think Pete is guilty," Carson said, as he sank into his big chair. "He's not that stamp of negro."

"Well, I haven't made up my mind on that score," the other remarked. "Up to the time he left here he seemed really harmless enough, but we don't know what may have taken place since then between

him and Johnson. Funny we didn't think of the danger of sticking match to tinder like that. I admit I was in favor of sending him. Miss Helen was so pleased over it, too. I met her the other day at the post-office and she was telling me, with absolute delight, that Pete was doing well over there, working like an old-time cornfield darky, and behaving himself. Now, I suppose, she will be terribly upset."

Carson sighed. "We blame the mountain people, in times of excitement, for acting rashly, and yet right here in this quiet town half the citizens have already made up their minds that Pete committed the crime. Think of it, Garner!"

"Well, you see, it's pretty hard to imagine who *else* did it," Garner declared.

"I don't agree with you," disputed Carson, warmly; "when there are half a dozen negroes who were whipped just as Pete was and who have horrible characters. There's Sam Dudlow, the worst negro I ever saw, an ex-convict, and as full of devilment as an egg is of meat. I saw his scowling face the next day after he was whipped, and I never want to see it again. I'd hate to meet him in the dark, unarmed. He wasn't making open threats, as Pete was, but I'll bet he would have handled Johnson or Willis roughly if he had met either of them alone and got the advantage."

"Well, we are not trying the case," Garner said, dryly; "if we are, I don't know where the fees are to come from. Getting money out of an imaginary case is too much like a lawyer's first year under the shadow of his shingle."

XI

IMMEDIATELY on parting with Carson, Helen went down to Linda's cottage. Lewis was leaning over the little, low fence talking to a negro, who walked on as she drew near.

"Where is Mam' Linda?" she asked, guardedly.

"In de house, missy," Lewis answered, pulling off his old slouch hat and wadding it tightly in his fingers. "She 'ain't heard nothin' yit. Jim was des tellin' me er whole string er talk folks was havin' down on de street; but I told 'im not to let 'er hear it. Oh, missy, it gwine ter kill 'er. She cayn't stan' it. Des no longer 'n las' night she was settin' in dat do' talkin' 'bout how happy she was to hear Pete was doin' so well over on Marse Carson's place. She said she never would forget young marster's kindness to er old nigger 'oman, en now"—the old man spread out his hands in apathetic gesture before him—"now you see what it come to!"

"But nothing serious has really happened to Pete yet," Helen had started to say, when the old man stopped her.

"Hush, honey, she comin'!"

There was a sound of a footstep in the cottage. Linda appeared in the doorway, and with a clouded face and disturbed manner invited her mistress into

the cottage, placing a chair for the young lady, and dusting the bottom of it with her apron.

"How do you feel this morning, mammy?" Helen asked, as she sat down.

"I'm well ernough in my *body*, honey"—the old woman's face was averted—"but dat ain't all ter a pusson in dis life. Ef des my body was all I had, I wouldn't be so bad off, but it's my *mind*, honey. I'm worried 'bout dat boy ergin. I had bad dreams las' night, en thoo 'em all he seemed ter be in some trouble. Den when I woke dis mawnin' en tried ter think 'twas only des er dream, I ain't satisfied wid de way all of um act. Lewis look quar out'n de eyes, en everybody dat pass erlong hatter stop en lead Lewis off down de fence ter talk. I ain't no fool, honey! I nótice things when dey ain't natcherl. Den here you come 'fo' yo' breakfust-time. I've watched you, chile, sence you was in de cradle en know every bat er yo' sweet eyes. Oh, honey"—Linda suddenly sat down and covered her face with her hands, pressing them firmly in—"honey," she muttered, "suppen's done gone wrong. I've knowed it all dis mawnin' en I'm actually afeard ter ax you-all ter tell me. I—can't think of but one thing, I'm so muddled up, en dat is dat my boy done thowed up his work en gone away off somers wid bad company; en yit, honey"—she now rocked herself back and forth as if in torture and finished with a steady stare into Helen's face—"dat cayn't be it. Dat ain't bad ernough ter mek Lewis act like he is, en—en—well, honey, you might es well come out wid it. I've had trouble, en I kin have mo'."

Helen sat pale and undecided, unable to formulate

any adequate plan of procedure. At this juncture Lewis leaned in the doorway, and, as his wife's back was towards him, he could not see her face.

"I want ter step down-town er minute, Lindy," he said. "I'll be right back. I des want ter go ter de sto'. We're out er coffee, en—"

Linda suddenly turned her dark, agonized face upon him. "You are not goin' till you tell me what is gone wrong wid my child," she said. "What de matter wid Pete, Lewis?"

The old man's surprised glance wavered between his wife's face and Helen's. "Why, Lindy, who say—" he feebly began.

But she stopped him with a gesture at once impatient and full of fear. "Tell me!" she said, firmly—"tell me!"

Lewis shambled into the cottage and stood over her, a magnificent specimen of the manhood of his race. Helen's eyes were blinded by tears she could not restrain.

"'Tain't nothin', Lindy, 'pon my word 'tain't nothin' but dis," he said, gently. "Dar's been trouble over near Marse Carson's farm, but not one soul is done say Pete was in it—*not one soul.*"

"What sort o' trouble?" Linda pursued.

"Er man en his wife was killed over dar in baid last night."

"What man en woman?" Linda asked, her mouth falling open in suspense, her thick lip hanging.

"Abe Johnson en his wife."

Linda leaned forward, her hands locked like things of iron between her knees. "Who done it, Lewis?—who killed um?" she gasped.

"Nobody knows dat yit, Lindy. Mrs. Johnson lived er little while after de neighbors come, en she said it was er—she said it was er yaller nigger, en—en—" He went no further, being at the end of his diplomacy, and simply stood before her helplessly twisting his hat in his hands. The room was very still. Helen wondered if her own heart had stopped beating, so tense and strained was her emotion. Linda sat bent forward for a moment; they saw her raise her hands to her head, press them there convulsively, and then she groaned.

"Miz Johnson say it was a yaller nigger!" she moaned. "Oh, my Gawd!"

"Yes, but what dat, 'oman?" Lewis demanded in assumed sharpness of tone. "Dar's oodlin's en oodlin's er yaller niggers over dar."

"Dey ain't none of 'em been whipped by de daid man, 'cepin' my boy." Linda was now staring straight at him. "None of 'em never made no threats but Pete. Dey'll kill 'im—" She shuddered and her voice fell away into a prolonged sob. "You hear me? Dey'll hang my po' baby boy—hang 'im—*hang* 'im!"

Linda suddenly rose to her full height and stood glowering upon them, her face dark and full of passion and grief combined. She raised her hands and held them straight upward.

"I want ter curse Gawd!" she cried. "You hear me? I ain't done nothin' ter deserve dis here thing I've been er patient slave of white folks, en my mammy an' daddy was 'fo' me. I've acted right en done my duty ter dem what owned me, en—en now I face dis. I hear my onliest child beggin' fer um to

spare 'im en listen ter 'im. I hear 'im beggin' ter see his old mammy 'fo' dey kill 'im. I see 'em draggin' 'im off wid er rope roun'—" With a shriek the woman fell face downward on the floor. As if under the influence of a terrible nightmare, Helen bent over her. She was insensible. Without a word, Lewis lifted her in his arms and bore her to a bed in the corner.

"Dis gwine ter kill yo' old mammy, honey," he gulped. "She ain't never gwine ter git up fum under it—never in dis world."

But Helen, with womanly presence of mind, had dampened her handkerchief in some water and was gently stroking the dark face with it. After a moment Linda drew a deep, lingering breath and opened her eyes.

"Lewis," was her first thought, "go try en find out all you kin. I'm gwine lie here en pray Gawd ter be merciful. I said I'd curse 'Im, but I won't. He my mainstay. I *got* ter trust 'Im. Ef He fail me I'm lost. Oh, honey, yo' old mammy never axed you many favors; stay here wid 'er en pray—pray wid all yo' might ter let dis cup pass. Oh, Gawd, don't let 'em!—*don't* let 'em! De po' boy didn't do it. He wouldn't harm a kitten. He talked too much, case he was smartin' under his whippin', but dat was all!"

Motioning to Lewis to leave them alone, Helen sat down on the edge of the bed and put her arm round Linda's shoulders, but the old woman rose and went to the door and closed it, then she came back and stood by Helen in the half-darkness that now filled the room.

"I want you ter git down here by my baid en pray fer me, honey," she said. "Seem ter me lak de Lawd always have listen ter white folks mo' den de black, anyway, en I want you ter beg 'Im ter spare po' li'l' foolish Pete des dis time—*des dis once.*"

Kneeling by the bed, Helen covered her wet face with her hands. Linda knelt beside her, and Helen prayed aloud, her clear, sweet voice ringing through the still room.

XII

ON Carson Dwight's farm, as the place was not particularly well kept, the negro hands lived in dismantled log-cabins scattered here and there about the fields, or in the edge of the woods surrounding the place. In one of these, at the overseer's suggestion, Pete had installed himself, his household effects consisting only of a straw mattress thrown on the puncheon floor and a few cooking utensils for use over the big fireplace of the mud-and-log chimney.

Here he was sleeping on the night of the tragedy which had stirred the country-side into a white heat of race hatred. He had spent the first half of the night at a negro dance, two miles away, at a farm, and was much elated by finding that he had attracted marked attention and feminine favor, which was due to the fact that he was looked upon by the country blacks as something out of the usual run—a town darky with a glib tongue and many other accomplishments, and a negro, too, as Pete assured them, who stood high in the favor of his master, whose name carried weight wherever it was mentioned.

Shortly after dawn Pete was still sleeping soundly, as was his habit after a night of pleasure, when his door was rudely shaken.

"Pete Warren! Pete Warren!" a voice called out sharply. "Wake up in dar; wake up, I tell you!"

There was no response — no sound came from within the cabin except the deep respiration of the sleeper. The door was shaken again, and then, as it was not locked, and slightly ajar, the little old negro man on the outside pushed the shutter open and entered, stalking across the floor to where Pete lay.

"Wake up here, you fool!" he said, as he bent and shook Pete roughly. "Wake up, ef you know what good fer you."

Pete turned over; his snoring broke into little gasps. He opened his eyes, stared inquiringly for an instant, and then his eyelids began to close drowsily.

"Looky here!" He was roughly handled again by the black hand on his shoulder. "You young fool, you dance all night till you cayn't keep yo' eyes open in de day-time, but ef you don't git er move on you en light out er dis cabin you'll dance yo' last jig wid nothin' under yo' feet but wind. It 'll be er game er frog in de middle en you be de frog."

"What dat? — what dat you givin' me, Uncle Richmond?" Pete was now awake and sitting bolt upright on the mattress.

"Huh, I come ter tell you, boy, dat you 'bout ter git in trouble, en, fer all I know, de biggest you ever had in all yo' bo'n days."

"Huh, you say I is, Uncle Richmond?" Pete exclaimed, incredulously. "What wrong wid me?"

The old man stepped back till he could look through the cabin door over the fields upon which

the first streaks of daylight were falling in grayish, misty splotches.

"Pete," he said, "somebody done slip in Abe Johnson's house en brain him en his wife wid er axe."

"Huh, you don't say!" Pete stared in sleepy astonishment. "When dat happen, Uncle Richmond?"

"Las' night, er towards mawnin'," the old man said. "Ham Black come en tol' me. He say we better all hide out; it gwine ter be de biggest 'citement ever heard of in dese mountains; but, Pete, *you* de main one ter look out—you, you!"

"*Me!* Huh, what you say dat fer, Uncle Rich'?"

"'Ca'se dey gwine ter look fer you de fus one, Pete. You sho is been talkin' too much out yo' mouf 'bout dat whippin' Johnson done give you en Sam Dudlow, en de res' um in town dat night. Ham tol' me ter come warn you ter hide out, en dat quick. Ham say he know in reason you didn't do it, 'ca'se, he say, yo' bark is wuss'n yo' bite. Ham say he bet 'twas done by some nigger dat didn't talk so much. Ham say he mighty nigh sho Sam Dudlow done it, 'ca'se Sam met Abe Johnson in de big road yisterday en Johnson cussed 'im en lashed at 'im wid er whip. Ham say dat nigger come on ter de sto' lookin' lak er devil in men's clothes. But he didn't say nothin' even den. Look lak he was des lyin' low bidin' his time."

Pete got up and began to dress himself with the unimaginative disregard for danger that is characteristic of his race.

"I bet, myse'f, Sam done it," he said, reflectively.

"He's er bad yaller nigger, Uncle Richmond, en ever since Johnson en Dan Willis larruped we-all, he's been sulkin' en growlin'. But es you say, Uncle Rich', he didn't talk out open. He lay low."

"Dat don't mek no diffunce, boy," the old black man went on, earnestly; "you git out'n here in er hurry en mek er break fer dem woods. Even den I doubt ef dat gwine ter save yo' skin, 'ca'se Dan Willis got er pair er blood-hounds dat kin smell nigger tracks thoo er ten-inch snow."

"Huh, I say, Uncle Richmond, you don't know me," Pete said. "You don't know me, ef you 'low I'm gwine ter run fum dese white men. I 'ain't been nigh dat Abe Johnson's house—not even cross his line er fence. I promised Marse Carson Dwight not ter go nigh 'im, en—en I promised 'im ter let up on my gab out here, en I done dat, too. No, suh, Unc' Rich', you git somebody else ter run yo' foot-race. I'm gwine ter cook my breakfust lak I always do en den go out ter my sprouts dat hatter be grubbed. I got my task ter do, rain er shine."

"Look here, boy," the old man's blue-black eyes gleamed as he stared at Pete. "I know yo' mammy en daddy, en I like um. Dey good black folks er de ol' stripe, en always was friendly ter me, en I don't like ter see you in dis mess. I tell you, I'm er old man. I know how white men act in er case like dis —dey don't have one bit er pity er reason. Dey will kill you sho. Dey'd er been here 'fo' dis, but dey gittin' together. Listen! Hear dem hawns en yellin'?—dat at Wilson's sto'. Dey will be here soon. I don't want ter stan' here en argue wid you. I 'ain't had nothin' ter do wid it, but dey would sad-

dle some of it onto me ef dey found out I come here ter warn you. Hurry up, boy."

"I ain't gwine ter do it, Uncle Rich'," Pete declared, firmly, and with a grave face. "You are er old man, but you ain't givin' me good advice. Ef I run, dey would say I was guilty sho', en den, es you say, de dogs could track me down, anyway."

The boy's logic seemed unassailable. The piercing, beadlike eyes of the old man flickered. "Well," he said, "I done all I could. I'm gwine move on. Even now, dey may know I come here at dis early time, en mix me up in it. Good-bye. I hope fer Mammy Lindy's sake dat dey will let you off—I do sho."

Left alone, Pete went out to the edge of the wood behind his cabin and gathered up some sticks, leaves, and pieces of bark that had fallen from the decaying boughs of the trees, and brought them into the cabin and deposited them on the broad stone hearth. Then he uncovered the coals he had the night before buried in the ashes, and made a fire for the preparation of his simple breakfast. He had a sharp sense of animal hunger, which was due to his long walk to and from the dance and the fact that he was bodily sound and vigorous. He took as much fresh-ground corn-meal as his hands would hold from a tow bag in a corner of the room and put it into a tin pan. To this he added a cup of water and a bit of salt, stirring it with his hand till it was well mixed. He then deftly formed it into a pone, and, wrapping it in a clean husk of corn, he deposited it in the hot ashes, covering it well with live coals. Then he made his coffee, being careful that the water in the

pot did not rise as high as the point near the spout where the vessel leaked. Next he unwrapped a strip of "streak o' lean streak o' fat" bacon, and with his pocket-knife sliced some of it into a frying-pan already hot. These things accomplished, he had only to wait a few minutes for the heat to do its work, and he stepped back and stood in the doorway.

Far across the meadow, now under the slanting rays of the sun, he saw old Uncle Richmond, bow-legged and short, waddling along through the dewy grass and weeds, his head bowed, his long arms swinging at his sides.

"Huh!" was Pete's slow comment, "so somebody done already settled Abe Johnson's hash. I know in reason it was Sam Dudlow, en I reckon ef dat rampacious gang er white men lays hands on 'im—ef dey lays hands on 'im—" He was recalling certain details of the recent riots in Atlanta, and an unconscious shudder passed over him. "Well," he continued to reflect, "Abe Johnson was a hard man on black folks, but his wife was er downright good 'oman. Ever'body say she was, en she *was*. It was a gre't pity ter kill her dat way, but I reckon Sam was afeard she'd tell it on 'im en had ter kill um bofe. Yes, Miz Johnson was er good 'oman—good ter niggers. She fed lots of 'em behind dat man's back, en wished 'em well; en now, po', po' 'oman!"

Pete went back to the fireplace and with the blade of his knife turned the curling white and brown strips of bacon, and with the toe of his coarse, worn shoe pushed fresher coals against his coffee-pot. Then for a moment he stood gravely looking at the fire.

"Well," he mused, with a shrugging of his shoulders. "I wish des *one thing*. I wish Marse Carson was here. He wouldn't let 'em tech me. He's de best en smartest lawyer in Georgia, en he would tell 'em what er lot er fools dey was ter say I done it, when I was right dar 'n my baid. My! dat bacon smell good! I wish I had er few fresh hen aigs ter drap in dat brown grease. Huh! it make my mouf water."

There was no table in the room, and so when he had taken up his breakfast he sat down on the floor and ate it with supreme relish. Through all the meal, however, in spite of the arguments he was mentally producing, there were far under the crust of his being certain elemental promptings towards fear and self-preservation.

"Well, dar's one thing," he mused. "Marse Hillyer done laid me out my task ter do in de old fiel' en I ain't ergoin' to shirk it, 'ca'se Marse Carson gwine ter ax 'im, when he go in town, how I'm gittin' on, en I wants er good repo't. No, I ain't goin' ter shirk it, ef all de dogs en white men in de county come yelpin' on de hunt for Sam Dudlow."

XIII

HIS breakfast over, Pete shouldered his grubbing-hoe, an implement shaped like an adze, and made his way through the dewy undergrowth of the wood to an open field an eighth of a mile from his cabin. There he set to work on what was considered by farmers the hardest labor connected with the cultivation of the soil. It consisted of partly digging and partly pulling out by the roots the stout young bushes which infested the neglected old fields.

Pete was hard at work in the corner of a ten-rail worm-fence, when, hearing a sound in the wood, which sloped down from a rocky hill quite near him, he saw a farmer, who lived in the neighborhood, pause suddenly, even in a startled manner, and stare steadily at him.

"Oh!" Pete heard him exclaim; "why, you are Carson Dwight's new man, ain't you, from Darley?"

"Yes, suh, dat me," the negro replied. "Mr. Hillyer, de overseer fer my boss, set me on dis yer job. I want ter clean it up ter de branch by Sadday."

"Huh!" The man approached nearer, eying the negro closely from head to foot, his glance resting longer on Pete's hip-pocket than anywhere else. "Huh! I heard down at the store just now that you'd

left—throwed up your job, I mean—an' gone clean off."

"No, I hain't throwed up no job," the negro said, his slow intelligence groping for the possible cause of such a report. "I been right here since my boss sent me over, en I'm gwine stay lessen he sen' fer me ter tek care o' his hosses in town. I reckon you heard er Marse Carson Dwight's fine drivin' stock."

The farmer pulled his long brown beard, his eyes still on Pete's face; it was as if he had not caught the boy's last remark.

"They said down at the store that you left last night, after—that you went off last night. A man said he seed you at the nigger blow-out on Hilton's farm about one o'clock, and that after it was over you turned towards—I don't know—I'm just tellin' you what they said down at the store."

"I *was* at dat shindig," Pete said. "I walked fum here dar en back ergin."

"Huh, well"—the farmer's face took on a shrewd expression—"I must move on. I'm lookin' fer a brown cow with a white tail, an' blaze on 'er face."

As the man disappeared in the wood, Pete was conscious of a sense of vague uneasiness which somehow seemed to be a sort of augmented recurrence of the feeling left by the warning of his early visitor.

"Dat white man certainly act curi's," Pete mused, as he leaned on the handle of his hoe and stared at the spot where the farmer had disappeared in the woods. "I'll bet my hat he been thinkin', lak Uncle Rich' said dey would, dat I had er hand in dat bloody business. Po' Miz Johnson — I reckon dey layin' 'er out now. She certney was good. I re-

member how she tol' me at de spring de day I come here ter try en be a good, steady boy en not mek dem white men pounce on me ergin. Po' 'oman! Seem lak er gre't pity. I reckon Abe Johnson got what was comin' ter 'im, but it look lak even Sam Dudlow wouldn't er struck dat good 'oman down. Maybe he thought he had ter—maybe she cornered 'im; but I dunno; he's er tough nigger—de toughest I ever run ercross, en I've seed er lots um."

Pete leaned on the fence, wiped his perspiring brow with his bare hand, snapped his fingers like a whip to rid them of the drops of sweat, and allowed his thoughts to merge into the darker view of the situation. He was really not much afraid. Under grave danger, a negro has not so great a concern over death as a white man, because he is not endowed with sufficient intelligence to grasp its full import, and yet to-day Pete was feeling unusual qualms of unrest.

"Dar's one thing sho," he finally concluded; "dat white man looked powerful funny when he seed me, en he said he heard I'd run off. I'll bet my hat he's makin' a bee-line fer dat sto' ter tell 'em whar I is right now. I wish one thing. I wish Marse Carson was here; he'd sen' 'em 'bout deir business mighty quick."

With a shrug of indecision, the boy set to work. His back happened to be turned towards the store, barely visible over the swelling ground in the distance, and so he failed to note the rapid approach across the meadow of two men till they were close upon him. One was Jeff Braider, the sheriff of the county, a stalwart man of forty, in high top-boots, a

leather belt holding a long revolver, a broad-brimmed hat, and coarse gray suit; his companion was a hastily deputized citizen armed with a double-barrelled shot-gun.

"Put down that hoe, Pete!" the sheriff commanded, sharply, as the negro turned with it in his hand. "Put it down, I say! Drop it!"

"What I gwine put it down for?" the negro asked, in characteristic tone. "Huh! I got ter do my work."

"Drop it, and don't begin to give me your jaw," the sheriff said. "You've got to come on with us. You are under arrest."

"What you 'rest me fer?" Pete asked, still doggedly.

"You are accused of killing the Johnsons last night, and if you didn't do it, I'm here to say you are in the tightest hole an innocent man ever got in. King and I are going to do our level best to put you in safety in the Gilmore jail so you can be tried fairly by law, but we've got to get a move on us. The whole section is up in arms, and we'll have hard work dodging 'em. Come on. I won't rope you, but if you start to run we'll shoot you down like a rabbit, so don't try that on."

"My Gawd, Mr. Braider, I didn't kill dem folks!" Pete said, pleadingly. "I don't know a thing about it."

"Well, whether you did or not, they say you threatened to do it, and your life won't be worth a hill of beans if you stay here. The only thing to do is to get you to the Gilmore jail. We may make it through the mountains if we are careful, but we've

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got to git horses. We can borrow some from Jabe Parsons down the road, if he hasn't gone crazy like all the rest. Come on."

"I tell you, Mr. Braider, I don't know er thing 'bout dis," Pete said; "but it looks ter me lak mebby Sam Dudlow—"

"Don't make any statement to me," the officer said, humanely enough in his rough way. "You are accused of a dirty job, Pete, and it will take a dang good lawyer to save you from the halter, even if we save you from this mob; but talkin' to me won't do no good. Me'n King here couldn't protect you from them men if they once saw you. I tell you, young man, all hell has broke loose. For twenty miles around no black skin will be safe, much less yours. Innocent or guilty, you've certainly shot off your mouth. Come on."

Without further protest, Pete dropped his hoe and went with them. Doggedly, and with an overpowering and surly sense of injury, he slouched along between the two men.

A quarter of a mile down a narrow, private road, which was traversed without meeting any one, they came to Parsons' farm-house, a one-story frame building with a porch in front, and a roof that sloped back to a crude lean-to shed in the rear. A wagon stood under the spreading branches of a big beech, and near by a bent-tongued harrow, weighted down by a heap of stones, a chicken-coop, an old beehive, and a ramshackle buggy. No one was in sight. No living thing stirred about the place, save the turkeys and ducks and a solitary peacock strutting about in the front yard, where rows of

half-buried stones from the mountain-sides formed the jagged borders of a gravel walk from the fence to the steps.

The sheriff drew the gate open and, according to rural etiquette, hallooed lustily. After a pause the sound of some one moving in the house reached their ears. A window-curtain was drawn aside, and later a woman stood in the doorway and advanced wonderingly to the edge of the porch. She was portly, red of complexion, about middle-aged, and dressed in checked gingham, the predominating color of which was blue.

"Well, I'll be switched!" she ejaculated; "what do you-uns want?"

"Want to see Jabe, Mrs. Parsons; is he about?"

"He's over in his hay-field, or was a minute ago. What you want with him?"

"We've got to borrow some hosses," the sheriff answered. "We want three—one fer each. We're goin' to try to dodge them blood-thirsty mobs, Mrs. Parsons, an' put this feller in jail, whar he'll be safe."

"*That* boy?" The woman came down the steps, rolling her sleeves up. "Why, that boy didn't kill them folks. I know that boy, he's the son of old Mammy Linda and Uncle Lewis Warren. Now, look here, Jeff Braider, don't you and Bill King go and make eternal fools o' yourselves. That boy didn't no more do that nasty work than I did. It ain't *in* 'im. He hain't that look. I know niggers as well as you or anybody else."

"No, I *didn't* do it, Mrs. Parsons," the prisoner affirmed. "I didn't! I didn't!"

"I know you didn't," said the woman. "Wasn't

I standin' here in the door this mornin' and saw him git up an' go out to git his wood and cook his breakfast? Then I seed 'im shoulder his grubbin'-hoe and go to the field to work. You officers may think you know it all, but no nigger ain't agoin' to stay around like that after killin' a man an' woman in cold blood. The nigger that did that job was some scamp that's fur from the spot by this time, and not a boy fetched up among good white folks like this one was, with the best old mammy and daddy that ever had kinky heads."

"But witnesses say he threatened Abe Johnson a month ago," argued Braider. "I have to do my duty, Mrs. Parsons. There never would be any justice if we overlooked a thing as pointed as that is."

"Threatened 'im?" the woman cried; "well, what does that prove? A nigger will talk back an' act surly on his death-bed if he's mad. That's all the way they have of defendin' theirselves. If Pete hadn't talked some after the lashin' he got from them men, thar'd 'a' been some'n' wrong with him. Now, you let 'im loose. As shore as you start off with that boy, he'll be lynched. The fact that you've got 'im in tow will be all them crazy men want. You couldn't get two miles in any direction from here without bein' stopped; they are as thick as fleas on all sides, an' every road is under watch."

"I'm sorry I can't take yore advice, Mrs. Parsons," Braider said, almost out of patience. "I've got my duty to perform, an' I know what it is a sight better than you do."

"If you start off with that boy his blood will be on yore head," the woman said, firmly. "Left

alone, and advised to hide out till this excitement is over, he might stand a chance to save his neck; but with you—why, you mought as well stand still and yell to that crazy gang to come on."

"Well, we've got to git horses to go on with, and yours are the nearest."

"Huh! you won't ride no harmless nigger to the scaffold on *my* stock," the woman said, sharply. "I know whar my duty lies. A woman with a thimbleful of brains don't have to listen to a long string of testimony to know a murderer when she sees one; that boy's as harmless as a baby and you are trying your level best to have him mobbed."

"Well, right is on my side, and I can take the horses if I see fit in the furtherance of law an' order," said Braider. "If Jabe was here he'd tell me to go ahead, an' so I'll have to do it anyway. Bill, you stay here on guard an' I'll bridle the horses an' lead 'em out."

A queer look, half of anger, half of definite purpose, settled on the strong, rugged face of the woman, as she saw the sheriff stalk off to the barn-yard gate, enter it, and let it close after him.

"Bill King," she said, drawing nearer the man left in charge of the bewildered prisoner, who now for the first time under the words of his defender had sensed his real danger—"Bill King, you hain't agoin' to lead that poor boy right to his death this way—you don't look like that sort of a man." She suddenly swept her furtive eyes over the barn-yard, evidently noting that the sheriff was now in the stable. "No, you hain't—for I hain't agoin' to *let* you!" And suddenly, without warning even to the slightest

change of facial expression, she grasped the end of the shot-gun the man held, and whirled him round like a top.

"Run, boy!" she cried. "Run for the woods, and God be with you!" For an instant Pete stood as if rooted to the spot, and then, as swift of foot as a young Indian, he turned and darted through the gate and round the farm-house, leaving the woman and King struggling for the possession of the gun. It fell to the ground, but she grasped King around the waist and clung to him with the tenacity of a bull-dog.

"Good God, Mrs. Parsons," he panted, writhing in her grasp, "let me loose!"

There was a smothered oath from the barn-yard, and, revolver in hand, the sheriff ran out.

"What the hell! — which way did he go?" he gasped.

But King, still in the tight embrace of his assailant, seemed too badly upset to reply. And it was not till Braider had torn her locked hands loose that King could stammer out, "Round the house—into the woods!"

"An' we couldn't catch 'im to save us from—" Braider said. "Madam, I'll handle you for this! I'll push this case against you to the full limit of the law!"

"You'll do nothin' of the kind," the woman said, "unless you want to make yourself the laughin'-stock of the whole community. In doin' what I done I acted fer all the good women of this country; an' when you run ag'in we'll beat you at the polls. Law an' order's one thing, but officers helpin' mobs

do their dirty work is another. If the boy deserves a trial he deserves it, but he'd not 'a' stood one chance in ten million in your charge, *an' you know it.*"

At this juncture a man emerged from the close-growing bushes across the road, a look of astonishment on his face. It was Jabe Parsons. "What's wrong here?" he cried, excitedly.

"Oh, nothin' much," Braider answered, with a white sneer of fury. "We stopped here with Pete Warren to borrow your horses to git 'im over the mountain to the Gilmore jail, an' your good woman grabbed Bill's gun while I was in the stable an' deliberately turned the nigger loose."

"Great God! what's the matter with you?" Parsons thundered at his wife, who, red-faced and defiant, stood rubbing a small bruised spot on her wrist.

"Nothin's the matter with me," she retorted, "except I've got more sense than you men have. I know that boy didn't kill them folks, an' I didn't intend to see you-all lynch 'im."

"Well, I know he did!" Parsons yelled. "But he'll be caught before night, anyway. He can't hide in them woods from hounds like they've got down the road."

"Your wife 'lowed he'd be safer in the woods than in the Gilmore jail," Braider said, with another sneer.

"Well, he *would*. As for that," Parsons retorted, "if you think that army headed by the dead woman's daddy an' brothers would halt at a puny bird-cage like that jail, you don't know mountain men. They'd smash the damn thing like an egg-shell. I reckon a

sheriff has to *pretend* to act fer the law, whether he earns his salary or not. Well, I'll go down the road an' tell 'em whar to look. Thar'll be a picnic som'er's nigh here in a powerful short while. We've got men enough to surround that whole mountain."

XIV

THE following night was a cloudless, moonlit one, and restlessly and heart-sore Helen walked the upper floor of the veranda, her eyes constantly bent on the street leading past Dwight's on to the centre of the town. The greater part of the day she had spent with Linda, trying to pacify her and rouse the hope that Pete would not be implicated in the trouble in the mountains. Helen had gone down to Carson's office about noon, feeling vaguely that he could advise her better than any one else in the grave situation. She had found Garner seated at his desk, bent over a law-book, a studious expression on his face. Seeing her in the doorway, he sprang up gallantly and proffered a rickety chair, from which he had hastily dumped a pile of old newspapers.

"Is Carson in?" she asked, sitting down.

"Oh no, he's gone over to the farm," Garner said. "I couldn't hold him here after he heard of the trouble. You see, Miss Helen, he thinks, from a few things picked up, that Pete is likely to be suspected and be roughly handled, and, you know, as he was partly the cause of the boy's going there, he naturally would feel—"

"I was the *real* cause of it," the girl broke in, with

a sigh and a troubled face. "We both thought it was for the best, and if it results in Pete's death I shall never forgive myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't look at it that way," Garner said. "You were both acting for what you thought was right. As I say, I tried my best to keep Carson from going over there to-day, but he would go. We almost had an open rupture over it. You see, Miss Helen, I have set my head on seeing him in the legislature, and he is eternally doing things that kill votes. There is not a thing in the category of political offences as fatal as this very thing. He's already taken Pete's part and abused the men who whipped him, and now that the boy is suspected of retaliating and killing the Johnsons, why, the people will—well, I wouldn't be one bit surprised to see them jump on Carson himself. Men infuriated like that haven't any more sense than mad dogs, and they won't stand for a white man opposing them. But, of course, you know why Carson is acting so recklessly."

"I do? What do you mean, Mr. Garner?"

The lawyer smiled, wiped his facile mouth with his small white hand, and said, teasingly: "Why, you are at the bottom of it. Carson wants to save the boy simply because you are indirectly interested in him. That's the whole thing in a nutshell. He's been as mad as a wet hen ever since they whipped Pete, because he was the son of your old mammy, and now that the boy's in actual peril Carson has gone clean daft. Well, it's reported among the gossips about town that you turned him down, Miss Helen—like you did some of the balance of us presumptuous

chaps that didn't know enough to keep our hearts where they belonged—but you sat on the best man in the bunch when you did it. It's me that's doing this talking."

Helen sat silent and pale for a moment, unable to formulate a reply to his outspoken remark. Presently she said, evasively:

"Then you think both of them are in actual danger?"

"Well, Pete hasn't one chance in a million," Garner said, gently. "There is no use trying to hide that fact; and if Carson should happen to run across Dan Willis—well, one or the other would have to drop. Carson is in a dangerous mood. He believes as firmly in Pete's innocence as he does in his own, and if Dan Willis dared to threaten him, as he's likely to do when they meet, why, Carson would defend himself."

Helen drew her veil down over her eyes and Garner could see that she was quivering from head to foot.

"Oh, it's awful—awful!" he heard her say, softly. Then she rose and moved to the open door, where she stood as if undecided what step to take. "Is there no way to get any—any news?" she asked, tremulously.

"None now," he told her. "In times of excitement over in the mountains, few people come into town; they all want to stay at home and see it through."

She stepped out on the sidewalk, and he followed her, gallantly holding his hat in his hand. Scarcely a soul was in sight. The town seemed deserted.

"Madam, rumor," Garner said, with a smile, "re-

ports that your friend Mr. Sanders, from Augusta, is coming up for a visit."

"Yes, I had a letter from him this morning," Helen said, in a dignified tone. "My father must have spoken of it. It will be Mr. Sanders' first visit to Darley, and he will find us terribly upset. If I knew how to reach him I'd ask him to wait a few days till this uncertainty is over, but he is on his way here—is, in fact, stopping somewhere in Atlanta—and intends to come on up to-morrow or the next day. Does—does Carson—has he heard of Mr. Sanders' coming?"

"Oh yes, it was sprung on him this morning for a deadly purpose," Garner said, with a significant smile. "The whole gang—Keith, Wade, and Bob Smith—were in here trying to keep him from going to the farm. They had tried everything they could think of to stop him, and as a last resort set in to teasing. Keith told him Sanders would sit in the parlor and say sweet things to you while Carson was trying to liberate the ex-slaves of your family at the risk of bone and sinew. Keith said Carson was showing the finest proof of fidelity that was ever given—fidelity to *the man in the parlor.*"

"Keith ought to have been ashamed of himself," Helen said, with her first show of vexation. "And what did Carson say?"

"The poor chap took it all in a good-humor," Garner said. "In fact, he was so much wrought up over Pete's predicament that he hardly heard what they were saying."

"You really think Carson is in danger, too?" Helen continued, after a moment's silence.

"If he meets Dan Willis, yes," said Garner. "If he opposes the mob, yes again. Dan Willis has already succeeded in creating a lot of unpopularity for him in that quarter, and the mere sight of Carson at such a time would be like a torch to a dry hay-stack."

So Helen had gone home and spent the afternoon and evening in real torture of suspense, and now, as she walked the veranda floor alone with a realization of the grim possibilities of the case drawn sharply before her mental vision, she was all but praying aloud for Carson's safe return, and anxiously keeping her gaze on the moonlit street below. Suddenly her attention was drawn to the walk in front of the Dwight house. Some one was walking back and forth in a nervous manner, the intermittent flare of a cigar flashing out above the shrubbery like the glow of a lightning-bug. Could it be—had Carson returned and entered by the less frequently used gate in the rear? For several minutes she watched the figure as it strode back and forth with never-ceasing tread, and then, fairly consumed with the desire to set her doubts at rest, she went down into the garden at the side of the house, softly approached the open gate between the two homesteads, and called out:

"Carson, is that you?"

The figure paused and turned, the fire of the cigar described a red half-circle against the dark background, but no one spoke. Then, as she waited at the gate, her heart in her mouth, the smoker came towards her. It was old Henry Dwight. He wore no hat nor coat, the night being warm, and one of his fat thumbs was under his broad suspender.

"No, it's not him, Miss Helen," he said, rather

gruffly. "He hasn't got back yet. I've had my hands full since supper. My wife is in a bad way. She has been worrying awfully since twelve o'clock, when Carson didn't turn up to dinner as usual. She's guessed what he went to the farm for, and she's as badly upset as old Linda is over that trifling Pete. I thought I had enough trouble before the war over *my* niggers, but here, forty years later, *yours* are upsetting things even worse. I only wish the men that fought to free the black scamps had some part of the burden to bear."

"It really is awful," Helen responded; "and so Mrs. Dwight is upset by it?"

"Oh yes, we had the doctor to come, and he gave some slight dose or other, but he said the main thing was to get Carson back and let her know for sure that he was safe and sound. I sent a man out there lickety-split on the fastest horse I have, and he ought to have got back two hours ago. That's what I'm out here for. I know she's not going to let me rest till her mind is at ease."

"Do you really think any actual harm could have come to Carson?" Helen inquired, anxiously.

"It could come to anybody who has the knack my boy has for eternally rubbing folks the wrong way," the old man retorted from the depths of his irritation; "but, Lord, my young lady, *you* are at the bottom of it!"

"I? Oh, Mr. Dwight, don't say that!" Helen pleaded.

"Well, I'm only telling you the *truth*," said Dwight, throwing his cigar away and putting both thumbs under his suspenders. "You know that as

well as I do. He sees how you are bothered about your old mammy, and he has simply taken up your cause. It's just what I'd 'a' done at his age. I reckon I'd 'a' fought till I dropped in my tracks for a girl I—but from all accounts you and Carson couldn't agree, or rather *you* couldn't. He seems to be agreeing now and staking his life and political chances on it. Well, I don't blame him. It never run in the Dwight blood to love more than once, an' then it was always for the pick of the flock. Well, you are the pick in this town, an' I wouldn't feel like he was my boy if he stepped down and out as easy as some do these days. I met him on his way to the farm and tried to shame him out of the trip. I joined the others in teasing him about that Augusta fellow, who can do his courting by long-distance methods in an easy seat at his writing-desk, while up-country chaps are doing the rough work for nothing, but it didn't feaze 'im. He tossed his stubborn head, got pretty red in the face, and said he was trying to help old Linda and Lewis out, and that he know well enough you didn't care a cent for him."

Helen had grown hot and cold by turns, and she now found herself unable to make any adequate response to such personal allusions.

"Huh, I see I got you teased, too!" Dwight said, with a short, staccato laugh. "Oh, well, you mustn't mind me. I'll go in and see if my wife is asleep, and if she is I'll go to bed myself."

Helen, deeply depressed, and beset with many conflicting emotions, turned back to the veranda, and, instead of going up to her room, she reclined

in a hammock stretched between two of the huge, fluted columns. She had been there perhaps half an hour when her heart almost stopped pulsating as she caught the dull beat of horses' hoofs up the street. Rising, she saw a horseman rein in at the gate at Dwight's. It was Carson; she knew that by the way he dismounted and threw the rein over the gate-post.

"Carson!" she called out. "Oh, Carson, I want to see you!"

He heard, and came along the sidewalk to meet her at the gate where she now stood. What had come over him? There was an utter droop of despondent weariness upon him, and then as he drew near she saw that his face was pale and haggard. For a moment he stood, his hand on the gate she was holding open, and only stared.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried. "I've been waiting for you. We haven't heard a word."

In a tired, husky voice, for he had made many a speech through the day, he told her of Pete's escape. "He's still hiding somewhere in the mountains," he said.

"Oh, then he may get away after all!" she cried.

Dwight said nothing, seeming to avoid her great, staring, anxious eyes. She laid her hand almost unconsciously on his arm.

"Don't you think he has a chance, Carson?" she repeated—"a bare chance?"

"The whole mountain is surrounded, and they are beating the woods, covering every inch of the ground," he said. "It is now only a question of time. They will wait till daybreak, and then con-

tinue till they have found him. How is Mam' Linda?"

"Nearly dead," Helen answered, under her breath.

"And my mother?" he said.

"She is only worried," Helen told him. "Your father thinks she will be all right as soon as she is assured of your return."

"Only worried? Why, he sent me word she was nearly dead," Carson said, with a feeble flare of indignation. "I wanted to stay, to be there to make one final effort to convince them, but when the message reached me, and things were at a standstill anyway, I came home, and now, even if I started back to-night, I'd likely be too late. He tricked me—my father tricked me!"

"And you yourself? Did you meet that—Dan Willis?" Helen asked. He stared at her hesitatingly for an instant, and then said:

"I happened not to. He was very active in the chase and seemed always to be somewhere else. He killed all my efforts." Carson leaned heavily against the white paling fence as he continued. "As soon as I'd talk a crowd of men into my way of thinking, he'd come along and fire them with fury again. He told them I was only making a grandstand play for the negro vote, and they swallowed it. They swallowed it and jeered and hissed me as I went along. Garner is right. I've killed every chance I ever had with those people. But I don't care."

Helen sighed. "Oh, Carson, you did it all because—because I felt as I did about Pete. I know that was it."

He made no denial as he stood awkwardly avoiding her eyes.

"I shall never, never forgive myself," she said, in pained accents. "Mr. Garner and all your friends say that your election was the one thing you held desirable, the one thing that would—would thoroughly reinstate you in your father's confidence, and yet I—I—oh, Carson I *did* want you to win! I wanted it—wanted it—wanted it!"

"Oh, well, don't bother about that," he said, and she saw that he was trying to hide his own disappointment. "I admit I started into this because—because I knew how keenly you felt for Linda, but to-day, Helen, as I rode from mad throng to mad throng of those good men with their dishevelled hair and bloodshot eyes, their very souls bent to that trail, that pitiful trail of revenge, I began to feel that I was fighting for a great principle, a principle that you had planted within me. I gloried in it for its own sake, and because it had its birth in your sweet sympathy and love for the unfortunate. I could never have experienced it but for you."

"But you failed," Helen almost sobbed. "You failed."

"Yes, utterly. What I've done amounted to nothing more than irritating them. Those men, many of whom I love and admire, were wounded to their hearts, and I was only keeping their sores open with my fine-spun theories of human justice. They will learn their lesson slowly, but *they will learn it.* When they have caught and lynched poor, stupid Pete, they may learn later that he was innocent, and then they will realize what I was trying to keep them

from doing. They will be friendly to me then, but Wiggin will be in office."

"Yes, my father thinks this thing is going to defeat you." Helen sighed. "And, Carson, it's killing me to think that I am the prime cause of it. If I'd had a man's head I'd have known that your effort could accomplish nothing, and I'd have been like Mr. Garner and the others, and asked you not to mix up in it; but I couldn't help myself. Mam' Linda has your name on her lips with every breath. She thinks the sun rises and sets in you, and that you only have to give an order to have it obeyed."

"That's the pity of it," Carson said, with a sigh.

At this juncture there was the sound of a window-sash sliding upward, and old Dwight put out his head.

"Come on in!" he called out. "Your mother is awake and absolutely refuses to believe you haven't a dozen bullet-holes in you."

"All right, father, I'm coming," Carson said, and impulsively he held out his hand and clasped Helen's in a steady, sympathetic pressure.

"Now, you go to bed, little girl," he said, more tenderly than he realized. In fact, it was a term he had used only once before, long before her brother's death. "Pardon me," he pleaded; "I didn't know what I was saying. I — I was worried over seeing you look so tired, and — and I spoke without thinking."

"You can say it whenever you wish, Carson," she said. "As if I could get angry at you after—after—" But she did not finish, for with her hand still warmly clasping his fingers, she was listening to a distant

sound. It was a restless human tread on a resounding floor.

"It's Mam' Linda," Helen said. "She walks like that night and day. I must go to her and—tell her you are back, but oh, how *can* I? Good-night, Carson. I'll never forget what you have done—never!"

XV

AFTER an almost sleepless night, spent for the greater part in despondent reflections over his failure in the things to which he had directed his hopes and energies, Carson rose about seven o'clock, went into his mother's room to ask how she had rested through the night, and then descended to breakfast. It was eight o'clock when he arrived at the office. Garner was there in a cloud of dust, sweeping a pile of torn papers into the already filled fireplace.

"I'm going to touch a match to this the first rainy day—if I think of it," he said. "It's liable to set the roof on fire when it's dry as it is now."

"Any news from the mountains?" Carson asked, as he sat down at his desk.

"Yes; Pole Baker was in here just now." Garner leaned his broom-handle against the mantel-piece, and stood critically eying his partner's worn face and dejected mien. "He said the mob, or mobs, for there are twenty factions of them, had certainly hemmed Pete in. He was hiding somewhere on Elk Knob, and they hadn't then located him. Pole left there long before day and said they had already set in afresh. I reckon it will be over soon. He told me to keep you here if I had to swear out a writ of

dangerous lunacy against you. He says you have not only killed your own political chances, but that you couldn't save the boy if you were the daddy of every man in the chase. They've smelled blood and they want to taste it."

"You needn't worry about me," Carson said, dejectedly. "I realize how helpless I was yesterday, and am still. There was only one thing that might have been done if we had acted quickly, and that was to telegraph the Governor for troops."

"But you wouldn't sanction that; you know you wouldn't," said Garner. "You know every mother's son of those white men is acting according to the purest dictates of his inner soul. They think they are right. They believe in law, and while I am a member of the bar, by Heaven! I say to you that our whole legal system is rotten to the core. Politics will clear a criminal at the drop of a hat. A dozen voters can jerk a man from life imprisonment to the streets of this town by a single telegram. No, you know those sturdy men over there think they are right, and you would not be the cause of armed men shooting them down like rabbits in a fence corner."

"No, they think they are right," Carson said. "And they were my friends till this came up. Any mail?"

"I haven't been to the post-office. I wish you'd go. You need exercise; you are off color—you are as yellow as a new saddle. Drop this thing. The Lord Himself can't make water run up-hill. Quit thinking about it."

Carson went out into the quiet street and walked

along to the post-office. At the intersection of the streets near the Johnston House, on any ordinary day, a dozen drays and hacks in the care of negro drivers would have been seen, and on the drays and about the hacks stood, as a rule, many idle negro men and boys; but this morning the spot was significantly vacant. At the negro barber-shop, kept by Buck Black, a mulatto of marked dignity and intelligence for one of his race, only the black barbers might be seen, and they were not lounging about the door, but stood at their chairs, their faces grave, their tongues unusually silent. They might be asking themselves questions as to the possible extent of the fires of race-hatred just now raging—if the capture and death of Pete Warren would quench the conflagration, or if it would roll on towards them like the licking flames of a burning prairie—they might, I say, ask *themselves* such questions, but to the patrons of their trade they kept discreet silence. And no white man who went near them that day would ask them what they believed or what they felt, for the blacks are not a people who give much thought even to their own social problems. They had leaned for many generations upon white guidance, and, with childlike, hereditary instinct, they were leaning still.

Finding no letters of importance in the little glass-faced and numbered box at the post-office, Carson, sick at heart and utterly discouraged, went up to the Club. Here, idly knocking the balls about on a billiard-table, a cigar in his mouth, was Keith Gordon.

"Want to play a game of pool?" he asked.

"Not this morning, old man," Carson answered.

"Well, I don't either," said Keith. "I went to the bank and tried to add up some figures for the old man, but my thinker wouldn't work. It's out of whack. That blasted nigger Pete is the prime cause of my being upset. I came by Major Warren's this morning. Sister feels awfully sorry for Mam' Linda, and asked me to take her a jar of jelly. You know old colored people love little attentions like that from white people, when they are sick or in trouble. Well" — Keith held up his hands, the palms outward—"I don't want any more in mine. I've been to death-bed scenes, funerals, wrecks on railroads, and all sorts of horrors, but that was simply too much. It simply beggars description—to see that old woman bowed there in her door like a dumb brute with its tongue tied to a stake. It made me ashamed of myself, though, for not at least trying to do something. I glory in you, old man. You failed, but you *tried*. By-the-way, that's the only comfort Mam' Linda has had—the only thing. Helen was there, the dear girl — and to think her visit home has to be like this!—she was there trying to soothe the old woman, but nothing that was said could produce anything but that awful groaning of hers till Lewis said something about your going over there yesterday, and that stirred her up. She rose in her chair and walked to the gate and folded her big arms across her breast.

"'I thank God young marster felt fer me dat way,' she said. 'He's de best young man on de face o' de earth. I'll go down ter my grave blessing 'im fer dis. He's got er *soul* in 'im. He knows how old Mammy Lindy feels en he was tryin' ter help her,

God bless 'im! He couldn't do nothin', but he tried —he tried, dough everybody was holdin' 'im back en sayin' it would spile his 'lection. Well, if it *do* harm 'im, it will show dat Gawd done turn ergin white en black bofe.' I came away," Keith finished, after a pause, in which Carson said nothing. "I couldn't stand it. Helen was crying like a child, her face wet with tears, and she wasn't trying to hide it. I was looking for some one to come every minute with the final news, and I didn't want to face that. Good God, old man, what are we coming to? Historians, Northern ones, seem to think the days of slavery were benighted, but God knows such things as this never happened then. Now, did it?"

"No; it's terrible," Carson agreed, and he stepped to a window and looked out over the roofs of the near-by stores to the wagon-yard beyond.

"Well, the great and only, the truly accepted one," Keith went on, in a lighter tone, "the man who did us all up brown, Mr. Earle Sanders, of Augusta, has unwittingly chosen a gloomy date for his visit. He's here, installed in the bridal-chamber of the Hotel de Johnston. Helen got a note from him just as I was leaving. On my soul, old man—maybe it's because I want to see it that way—but, really, it didn't seem to me that she looked exactly elated, you know, like I imagined she would, from the way the local gossips pile it on. You know, the idea struck me that maybe she is not *really engaged*, after all."

"She is worried; she is not herself to-day," Carson said, coldly, though in truth his blood was surging hotly through his veins. It had come at last. The man who was to rob him of all he cared for in

life was at hand. Turning from Keith, he pretended to be looking over some of the dog-eared magazines in the reading-room, and then feeling an overwhelming desire to be alone with the dull pain in his breast, he waved a careless signal to Keith and went down to the street. In front of the hotel stood a pair of sleek, restive bays harnessed to a new top-buggy. They were held by the owner of the best livery-stable in the town, a rough ex-mountaineer.

"Say, Carson," the man called out, proudly, "you'll have to git up early in the morning to produce a better yoke of thorough-breds than these. Never been driven over these roads before. I didn't intend to let 'em out fer public use right now, but a big, rich fellow from Augusta is here sparkin', and he wanted the best I had and wouldn't touch anything else. Money wasn't any object. He turned up his nose at all my other stock. Gee! look at them trim legs and thighs—a dead match as two black-eyed peas."

"Yes, they are all right." Carson walked on and went into Blackburn's store, for no other reason than that he wanted to avoid meeting people and discussing the trouble Pete Warren was in, or hearing further comments on the stranger's visit. He might have chosen a better retreat, however, for in a group at the window nearest the hotel he found Blackburn, Garner, Bob Smith, and Wade Tingle, all peering stealthily out through the dingy glass at the team Carson had just inspected.

"He'll be out in a minute," Wade was saying, in an undertone. "Quit pushing me, Bob! They say he's got dead loads of money."

"You bet he has," Bob declared; "he had a wad of it in big bills large enough to stuff a sofa-pillow with. Ike, the porter, who trucked his trunk up, said he got a dollar tip. The head waiter is expecting to buy a farm after he leaves. Gee! there he comes! Say, Garner, *you* ought to know; is that a brandy-and-soda complexion?"

"No, he doesn't drink a drop," answered Garner. "Well, he looks all right, as well as I can see through this immaculate window with my eyes full of spider-webs. My, what clothes! Say, Bob, is that style of derby the thing now? It looks like an inverted milk-bucket. Come here, Carson, and take a peep at the conqueror. If Keith were here we'd have a quorum. By George, there's Keith now! He's watching at the window of the barber-shop. Call him over, Blackburn. Let's have him here; we need more pall-bearers."

"Seems to me you boys are the corpses," Blackburn jested. "I'd be ashamed to let a clothing-store dummy like that beat me to the tank."

Carson had heard enough. In his mood and frame of mind their open frivolity cut him to the quick. Going out, unnoticed by the others, he went to his office. In the little, dusty consultation-room in the rear there was an old leather couch. On this he threw himself. There had been moments in his life when he had-worn the crown of misery, notably the day Albert Warren was buried, when, on approaching Helen to offer her his sympathies, she had turned from him with a shudder. That had been a gloomy hour, but *this*—he covered his face with his hands and lay still. On that day a faint hope had

vaguely fluttered within him—a hope of reformation; a hope of making a worthy place for himself in life and of ultimately winning her favor and forgiveness. But now it was all over. He had actually seen with his own eyes the man who was to be her husband. He was sure now that the report was true. The visit at such a grave crisis confirmed all that had been said. Helen had telegraphed him of her trouble, and Sanders had made all haste to reach her side.

XVI

BEHIND the dashing bays the newcomer drove down to Warren's. On the seat beside him sat a negro boy sent from the livery-stable to hold the horses. Sanders was dressed in the height of fashion, was young, of the blond type, and considered handsome. A better figure no man need have desired. The people living in the Warren neighborhood, who peered curiously out of windows, not having Dwight's affairs at heart, indulged in small wonder over the report that Helen was about to accept such a specimen of city manhood in preference to Carson or any of "the home boys."

Alighting at the front gate, Sanders went to the door and rang. He was admitted by a colored maid and shown into the quaint old parlor with its tall, gilt-framed, pier-glass mirrors and carved mahogany furniture. The wide front, lace-curtained windows, which opened on a level with the veranda floor, let in a cooling breeze which was most agreeable in contrast to the beating heat out-of-doors.

He had only a few minutes to wait, for Helen had just returned from a visit to Linda's cottage and was in the library across the hall. He heard her coming and stood up, flushing expectantly, an eager light flashing in his eyes.

"I am taking you by surprise," he said, as he grasped her extended hand and held it for an instant.

"Well, you know you told me when I left," Helen said, "that it would be impossible for you to get away from business till after the first of next month, so I naturally supposed—"

"The trouble was"—he laughed as he stood courteously waiting for her to sit before doing so himself—"the trouble was that I didn't know myself then as I do now. I thought I could wait like any sensible man of my age, but I simply couldn't, Helen. After you left, the town was simply unbearable. I seemed not to want to go anywhere but to the places to which we went together, and there I suffered a regular agony of the blues. The truth is, I'm killing two birds with one stone. We were about to send our lawyer to Chattanooga to settle up a legal matter there, and I persuaded my partner to let me do it. So you see, after all, I shall not be wholly idle. I can run up there from here and back, I believe, in the same day."

"Yes, it is not far," Helen answered. "We often go up there to do shopping."

"I'm going to confess something else," Sanders said, flushing slightly. "Helen, you may not forgive me for it, but I've been uneasy."

"Uneasy?" Helen leaned as far back in her chair as she could, for he had bent forward till his wide, hungry eyes were close to hers.

"Yes, I've fought the feeling every day and night since you left. At times my very common-sense would seem to conquer and I'd feel a little better

about it, but it would only be a short time till I'd be down in the dregs again."

"Why, what is the matter?" Helen asked, half fearfully.

"It was your letters, Helen," he said, his handsome face very grave as he leaned towards her.

"My letters? Why, I wrote as often—even oftener—than I promised," the girl said.

"Oh, don't think me over-exacting," Sanders implored her with eyes and voice. "I know you did all you agreed to do, but somehow—well, you know you seemed so much like one of us down there that I had become accustomed to thinking of you as almost belonging to Augusta; but your letters showed how very dear Darley and its people are to you, and I was obliged to—well, face the grim fact that we have a strong rival here in the mountains."

"I thought you knew that I adore my old home," she said, simply.

"Oh yes, I know—most people do—but, Helen, the letter you wrote about the dance your friends—your 'boys,' as you used to call them—gave you at that quaint club, why, it is simply a piece of literature. I've read it over and over time after time."

"Oh, I only wrote as I felt, out of a full heart," the girl said. "When you meet them, and know them as I do, you will not wonder at my fidelity—at my enthusiasm over that particular tribute."

Sanders laughed. "Well, I suppose I am simply jealous — jealous not alone for myself, but for Augusta. Why, you can't imagine how you are missed. A party of the old crowd went around to your aunt's as usual the Wednesday following your

departure, but we were so blue we could hardly talk to one another. Helen, the spirit of our old gatherings was gone. Your aunt actually cried, and your uncle really drank too much brandy and soda."

"Well, you mustn't think I don't miss them all," Helen said, deeply touched. "I think of them every day. It was only that I had been away so long that it was glorious to get back home—to my real home again. I love it down there; it is beautiful; you were all so lovely to me, but this here is different."

"That's what I felt in reading your letters," Sanders said. "A tone of restful content and happiness was in every line you wrote. Somehow, I wanted you, in my selfish heart, to be homesick for us so that you would"—the visitor drew a deep breath—"be all the more likely to—to consent to live there, you know, *some day*, permanently."

Helen made no reply, and Sanders, flushing deeply, wisely turned the subject, as he rose and went to a window and drew the curtain aside.

"Do you see those horses?" he asked, with a smile. "I brought them thinking I might prevail on you to take a drive with me this morning. I have set my heart on seeing some of the country around the town, and I want to do it with you. I hope you can go."

"Oh, not to-day! I couldn't think of it to-day!" Helen cried, impulsively.

"Not to-day?" he said, crestfallen.

"No. Haven't you heard about Mam' Linda's awful trouble?"

"Oh, that is *her* son!" Sanders said. "I heard something of it at the hotel. I see. She really must be troubled."

"It is a wonder it hasn't killed her," Helen answered. "I have never seen a human being under such frightful torture."

"And can nothing be done?" Sanders asked. "I'd really like to be of use—to help, you know, in *some* way."

"There is nothing to be done—nothing that *can* be done," Helen said. "She knows that, and is simply waiting for the end."

"It's too bad," Sanders remarked, awkwardly. "Might I go to see her?"

"I think you'd better not," said the girl. "I don't believe she would care to see any but very old friends. I used to think I could comfort her, but even I fail now. She is insensible to anything but that one haunting horror. She has tried a dozen times to go over to the mountains, but my father and Uncle Lewis have prevented it. That mob, angry as they are, might really kill her, for she would fight for her young like a tigress, and people wrought up like those are mad enough to do anything."

"And some people think the negro may not really be guilty, do they not?" Sanders asked.

"I am sure he is not," Helen sighed. "I feel it; I know it."

There was the sound of a closing gate, and Helen looked out.

"It is my father," she said. "Perhaps he has heard something."

Leaving her guest, she went out to the steps. "Whose turn-out?" the Major asked, with admiring curiosity, indicating the horses and buggy.

"Mr. Sanders has come," she said, simply. "He's in the parlor. Is there any news?"

"Nothing." The old man removed his hat and wiped his perspiring brow. "Nothing except that Carson Dwight has gone over there on a fast horse. Linda sent him a message, begging him to make one more effort, and he went. All his friends tried to stop him, but he dashed out of town like a madman. He won't accomplish a thing, and it may cost him his life, but he's the right sort, daughter. He's got a heart in him as big as all out-of-doors. Blackburn told him Dan Willis was over there, a raging demon in human shape, but it only made Carson the more determined. His father saw him and ordered him back, and was speechless with fury when Carson simply waved his hand and rode on. Go back to the parlor. I'll join you in a minute."

"Have you heard anything?" Sanders asked, as Helen re-entered the room and stood white and distraught before him.

She hesitated, her shifting glance on the floor, and then she stared at him almost as one in a dream. "He has heard nothing except—except that Carson Dwight has gone over there. He has gone. Mam' Linda begged him to make one other effort and he couldn't resist her. She—she was good to his mother and to him when he was a child, and he feels grateful. She thinks he is the only one that can help. She told me last night that she believed in him as she once believed in God. He can do nothing, but he knew it would comfort her for him to try."

"This Mr. Dwight is one of your—your old friends, is he not?"

Sanders' face was the playground of conflicting emotions as he stood staring at her.

"Yes," Helen answered; "one of my best and truest."

He has undertaken a dangerous thing, has he not?" Sanders managed to say.

"Dangerous?" Helen shuddered. "He has an enemy there who is now seeking his life. They are sure to meet. They have already quarrelled, and —*about this very thing.*"

She sat down in the chair she had just left and Sanders stood near her. There was a voice in the hall. It was the Major ordering a servant to bring in mint julep, and the next moment he was in the parlor hospitably introducing himself to the visitor.

Seeing her opportunity, Helen rose and left them together. She went up to her room, with heavy, dragging footsteps, and stood at the window overlooking the Dwight garden and lawn.

Carson knew that Sanders was in town, she told herself, in gloomy self-reproach. He knew his rival was with her, and right now as the poor boy was speeding on to—his death, he thought Sanders was making love to her. Helen bit her quivering lip and clinched her fingers. "Poor boy!" she thought, almost with a sob, "he deserves better treatment than that."

XVII

ON his escape from the sheriff and his deputy, Pete Warren ran with the speed of a deer-hound through the near-by woods. Thinking his pursuers were close behind him, he did not stop even to listen to their footsteps. Through dell and fen, up hill and down, over rocks and through tangled undergrowth he forged his way, his tongue lolling from the corner of his gaping mouth. The thorns and briers had torn gashes in his cheeks, neck, and hands, and left his clothing in strips. The wild glare of a hunted beast was in his eyes. The land was gradually sloping upward. He was getting upon the mountain. For a moment the distraught creature paused, bent his ear to listen and try to decide, rationally, calmly, which was the better plan, to hide in the caverns and craggy recesses of the frowning heights above or speed onward over more level ground. For a moment the drumlike pounding of his heart was all the sound he heard, and then the blast of a hunter's horn broke the stillness, not two hundred yards away, and was thrown back in reverberating echoes from the mountain-side. This was followed by a far-off answering shout, the report of a signal-gun, and then the mellow, terrifying baying of blood-hounds fell upon his ears. Pete stood

erect, his knees quivering. No thought of prayer passed through his brain. Prayer, to his mind, was only a series of empty vocal sounds heard chiefly in churches where black men and women stood or knelt in their best clothes, and certainly not for emergencies like this, where granite heavens were closing upon stony earth and he was caught between.

Suddenly bending lower, and fresher for the second wind he had got, he sped onward again, choosing the valley rather than the steeper mountain-side. Shouts, gun reports, horn-blasts, and the baying of the hounds now followed him. Presently he came to a clear mountain creek about twenty feet wide and not deeper anywhere than his waist, and in many places barely covering the slimy brown stones over which it flowed. Here, as if by inspiration, came the remembrance of some story he had heard about a pursued negro managing to elude the scent of blood-hounds by taking to water, and into the icy stream Pete plunged, and, slipping, stumbling, falling, he made his way onward.

But his reason told him this slow method really would not benefit him, for his pursuers would soon catch up and see him from the banks. He had waded up the stream about a quarter of a mile, when he came to a spot where the stout branches of a sturdy leaning beech hung down within his reach. The idea which came to him was worthy of a white man's brain, for, pulling on the bough and finding it firm, he decided upon the original plan of getting out of the water there, where his trail would be lost to sight or scent, and climbing into the dense foliage above. His pursuers might not think to look up-

ward at exactly that spot, and the hounds, bent on catching the scent from the ground where he landed, would speed onward, farther and farther away. At all events it was worth the trial.

With quivering hands he drew the bough down till its leaves sank under the water. It bore his weight well and from it he climbed to the massive trunk and higher upward, till, in a fork of the tree, he rested, noticing, with a throb of relief, that the bough had righted itself and hung as before above the surface of the stream. On came the dogs; he could not hear them now, for, intent upon their work, they made no sound, but the hoarse, maddened voices of men under their guidance reached his ears. The swish through the undergrowth, the patter, as of rain on dry leaves, as their claws hurled the ground behind them, the snuffing and sneezing—*that was the hounds.* Closer and closer Pete hugged the tree, hardly breathing, fearing now that the water dripping from his clothing or the bruised leaves of the bough might betray his presence. But the hounds, one on either side of the stream, their noses to the earth, dashed on. Pete caught only a gleam of their sleek, dun coats and they were gone. Behind them, panting, followed a dozen men. In his fear of being seen, Pete dared not even look at their inflamed faces. With closed eyes pressed against his wet coat-sleeve, he clung to his place, a hunted thing, neither fish, fowl, nor beast, and yet, like them all, a creature of the wilderness, endowed with the instinct of self-preservation.

"They will run 'im down!" he heard a man say. "Them dogs never have failed. The black devil

thought he'd throw 'em off by taking to water. He didn't know we had one for each bank."

On ran the men, the sound of their progress becoming less and less audible as they receded. Was he safe now? Pete's slow intelligence answered no. He was still fully alive to his danger. He might stay there for awhile, but not for long. Already, perhaps owing to his desperate running, he had an almost maddening thirst, a thirst which the sheer sight of the cool stream so near tantalized. Should he descend, satisfy his desire, and attempt to regain his place of hiding? No, for he might not seclude himself so successfully the next time. Then, with his face resting on his arm, he began to feel drowsy. Twisting his body about, he finally found himself in a position in which he could recline still close to the tree and rest a little, though his feet and legs, surcharged with blood, were painfully weighted downward. The forest about him was very quiet. Some bluebirds above his head were singing merrily. A gray squirrel with a fuzzy tail was perched inquiringly on the brown bough of a near-by pine. Pete reclined thus for several minutes, and then the objects about him appeared to be in a blur. The far off shouts, horn-blasts, and gun reports beat less insistently on his tired brain, and then he found himself playing with a kitten—the queerest, most amusing kitten—in the sunlight in front of his mother's door.

He must have slept for hours, for when he opened his eyes the sun was sinking behind the top of a distant hill. He tried to draw his aching legs up higher and felt stinging pricks of pain from his hips

to his toes, as his blood leaped into circulation again. After several efforts he succeeded in standing on the bough. To his pangs of thirst were now added those of hunger. For hours he stood thus. He saw the light of day die out, first on the landscape and later from the clear sky. Now, he told himself, under cover of night, he would escape, but something happened to prevent the attempt. Through the darkness he saw the flitting lights of many pine torches. They passed to and fro under the trees, sometimes quite near him, and as far as he could see up the mountain-sides they flickered like the sinister night-eyes of his doom. He stood till he felt as if he could do so no longer, and then he got down on the bough as before, and after hours of conscious hunger and thirst and cramping pains he slept again. Thus he passed that night, and when the golden rays of sunlight came piercing the gray mountain mists and flooding the landscape with its warm glory, Pete Warren, hearing the voices of sleepless revenge, now more numerous and harsh and packed with hate—hearing them on all sides from far and near—dared not stir. He remained perched in his leafy nook like some half-knowing, primeval thing, avoiding the flint-tipped arrows of the high-cheeked, straight-haired men lurking beneath.

XVIII

CARSON DWIGHT remained two days in the vicinity of his farm waiting gloomily for the discovery and arrest of Pete Warren, his sole hope being that at the last grewsome moment he might prevail on the distraught man-hunters to listen to a final appeal for law and order. He was forced, however, to return to Darley, feeling sure, as did the others, that Pete was hiding in some undiscovered place in the mountains, or shrewd and deft enough to avoid the approach of man or hound. But it would not be for long, the hunters told themselves, for the entire spot was surrounded and well guarded and they would starve him out.

"The gang" breathed more freely when they saw Carson appear in the doorway of the den on the night of his return, and learned that through some miracle he had failed to meet Dan Willis, though not one of them was favorably impressed by the outward appearance of their leader. His eyes, in their darkened sockets, gleamed like despondent fires; on his tanned cheeks hectic flushes had appeared and his hands quivered as if from nervous exhaustion. Not a man among them dared reproach him for the further and futile political mistake he had made. He was a ruined man, and yet they admired him the

more as they looked down on him, begrimed with the dregs of his failure. Garner's opinion, to himself expressed, was that Dwight was a failure only on the surface, but that it was the surface which counted everywhere except in heaven, and there no one knew what sort of coin would be current. Garner loved him. He loved him for his hopeless fidelity to Helen, for his firm-jawed clinging to a mere principle, such as trying to keep an old negro woman who had faith in him from breaking her heart, for his risking death itself to obtain full justice for the black boy who was his servant. Yes, Garner mused, Carson certainly deserved a better deal all round, but deserving a thing according to the highest ethics, and getting it according to the lowest were different.

The following night there was a queer, secret meeting of negroes in the town. Stealthily they left their cabins and ramshackle homes, and one by one they glided through the darkest streets and alleys to the house of one Neb Wynn, a man who had acquired his physical being and crudely unique personality from the confluence of three distinct streams of blood—the white, the Cherokee Indian, and the negro. He owned and drove a dray on the streets of the town, and being economical he had accumulated enough means to build the two-story frame (not yet painted) house in which he lived. The lower floor was used as a negro restaurant, which Neb's wife managed, the upper was devoted to the family bedroom, a guest-chamber for any one who wished to spend the night, and a fair-sized "hall," with windows on the street,which was

rented to colored people for any purpose, such as dances, lodge meetings or church sociables.

It was in this room, where no light burned, that the negroes assembled. Indeed, no sort of illumination was used below, and when a negro who had been secretly summoned reached the spot, he assured himself that no one was in sight, and then he approached the restaurant door on tiptoe, rapped twice with his knuckles, paused a moment, and then rapped three times. Thereupon Neb, with his ear to the key-hole on the inside, cautiously opened the door and drew the applicant within, and, closing the shutter softly, asked, "What is the password?"

"Mercy," was the whispered reply.

"What's the countersign?"

"Peace an' good-will to all men. Thy will be done. Amen."

"All right, I know you," Neb would say. "Go up ter de hall en set down, but mind you, don't speak *one* word!"

And thus they gathered—the men who were considered the most substantial colored citizens of the town. About ten o'clock Neb crept cautiously up the narrow stairs, entered the room, and sat down.

"We are all here," he announced. "Brother Hardcastle, I'm done wid my part. I ain't no public speaker; I'll leave de rest ter you."

A figure in one of the corners rose. He was the leading negro minister of the place. He cleared his throat and then said: "I would open with prayer, but to pray we ought to stand or kneel, and either thing would make too much disturbance. We can only ask God in our hearts, brothers, to be with us here in

the darkness, and help lead us out of our trouble; help us to decide if we can, singly or in a body, what course to pursue in the grave matter that faces our race. We are being sorely tried, tried almost past endurance, but the God of the white man is the God of the black. Through a dark skin the light of a pure heart shines as far in an appeal for help towards the throne of Heaven as through a white. I'm not prepared to make a speech. I can't. I am too full of sorrow and alarm. I have just left the mother of the accused boy and the sight of her suffering has upset me. I have no harsh words, either, for the white men of this town. Every self-respecting colored citizen has nothing but words of praise for the good white men of the South, and in my heart, I can't much blame the men of the mountains who are bent on revenge, for the crime perpetrated by one of our race was horrible enough to justify their rage. It is only that we want to see full justice done and the absolutely innocent protected. I have been talking to Brother Black to-day, and I feel—"

He broke off, for a hiss of warning as low as the rattle of a hidden snake escaped Neb Wynn's lips. On the brick sidewalk below the steps of some solitary passer-by rang crisply on the still night air. It died away in the distance and again all was quiet.

"Now you kin go on," Neb said. "We des got to be careful, gen'men. Ef a meetin' lak dis was knowed ter be on tap de last one of us would be in trouble, en dey would pull my house down fust. You all know dat."

"You are certainly right," the preacher resumed. "I was only going to call on Brother Black to say

something in a line with the talk I had with him to-day. He's got the right idea."

"I'm not a speaker," Buck Black began, as he stood up. "A man who runs a barber-shop don't have any too much time ter read and study, but I've giv' dis subject a lot o' thought fust an' last. I almost giv' up after dat big trouble in Atlanta; I 'lowed dar wasn't no way out of we-alls' plight, but I think diffunt now. A *white* man made me see it. I read some'n' yesterday in the biggest paper in dis State. It was written by de editor an' er big owner in it. Gen'men, it was de fust thing I've seed dat seemed ter me ter come fum on high as straight as a bolt of lightnin'. Brother black men, dat editor said dat de white race had tried de whip-lash, de rope, en de firebrand fer forty years en de situation was still as bad as ever. He said de question never would be plumb settled till de superior race extend a kind, helpful hand ter de ignorant black an' lead 'im out er his darkness en sin en crime. Gen'men, dem words went thoo en thoo me. I knowed dat man myself, when I lived in Atlanta; I've seed his honest face en know he meant what he said. He said it was time ter blaze er new trail, er trail dat hain't been blazed befo'—er trail of love en forgiveness en pity, er trail de Lord Jesus Christ would blaze ef he was here in de midst o' dis struggle."

"Dat so, dat so!" Neb Wynn exclaimed, in a rasping whisper. "Gawd know dat de trufe."

"An' I'm here ter-night," Buck Black continued, "ter say ter you all dat I'm ready ter join fo'ces wid white men like dat. De old time white man was de

darky's best friend; he owned 'im, but he helped 'im. In de old slave days black crimes lak our race is guilty of ter-day was never heard of—never nowhar! Dar's er young white man here in dis town, too, dat I love," Black continued, after a pause. "I needn't mention his name; I bound you it is writ on every heart in dis room. You all know what he did yesterday an' day befo'—in spite er all de argument en persuasions of his friends dat is backin' 'im in politics, he went out dar ter de mountains in de thick o' it. I got it straight. I seed er man fum dar yesterday, en he said Marse Carson Dwight was out 'mongst dem men pleadin' wid 'em ter turn Pete over ter him en de law. He promised ter give er bond dat was big enough ter wipe out all he owned on earth, ef dey'd only spare de boy's life en give 'im a trial. Dey say Dan Willis wanted ter shoot 'im, but Willis's own friends wouldn't let 'im git nigh 'im. I was in my shop last night when he come in town an' axed me ter shave 'im up so he could go home en pacify his mother. She was sick en anxious about him. He got in my chair. Gen'men, I used ter brag beca'se I shaved General John B. Gordon once, when he was up here speakin', but fum now on my boast will be shavin' Marse Carson Dwight. He got in de chair an' laid back so tired he looked lak er dyin' man. He was all spattered fum head ter foot wid mud dat he'd walked an' rid thoo. I was so sorry fer 'im I could hardly do my work. I was cryin' half de time, dough he didn't see it, 'ca'se he jes layed dar wid his eyes closed. Hate de white race lak some say we do?" Black's voice rose higher and quivered. "No, suh, I'll never hate de race dat

fetched dat white man in dis world. When he got out de chair de fus thing he ax was ef I'd heard how Mam' Lindy was. I told 'im she was pretty bad off, worried in her mind lak she was; den he turn fum de glass whar he was tyin' his necktie wid shaky fingers en said: 'I thought I might fetch 'er some hope, Buck, but I done give up. Ef I only had Pete in my charge safe in er good reliable jail I could free 'im, fer I don't believe he killed dem folks.' "

Buck Black paused. It was plain that his hearers were much affected, though no sound at all escaped them. The speaker was about to resume, when he was prevented by a sharp rapping on the stair below.

"Hush!" Neb Wynn commanded, in a warning whisper. He crept on tiptoe across the carpetless room, out into the hallway, and leaned over the baluster.

"Who dat?" he asked, in a calm, raised voice.

"It's me, Neb. I want ter see you. Come down!"

"It's my wife," Neb informed the breathless room. "Sounds lak she's scared 'bout some'n'. Don't say er word till I git back. Mind, you folks got ter be careful ter-night."

He descended the creaking stairs to the landing below. They caught the low mumbling of his voice intermingled with the perturbed tones of his wife, and then he crept back to them, strangely silent they thought, for after he had resumed his seat against the wall in the dark human circle, they heard only his heavy breathing. Fully five minutes passed, and then he sighed as if throwing something off his mind, some weight of perplexing indecision.

"Well, go on wid what you was sayin', Brother Black," he said. "I reckon our meetin' won't be 'sturbed."

"I almost got to what I was coming to," Buck Black continued, rising and leaning momentously on the back of his chair. "I was leadin' up to a gre't surprise, gen'men. I'm goin' to tell you faithful friends a secret, a secret which, ef it was out dat we knowed it, might hang us all. So far it rests wid des me an' a black 'oman dat kin be trusted, my wife. Gen'men, I know whar Pete Warren is. I kin lay my hands on 'im any time. He's right here in dis town ter-night."

A subdued burst of surprise rose from the dark room, then all was still, so still that the speaker's grasp of his chair gave forth a harsh, rasping sound.

"Yes, my wife seed 'im in de ol' lumber-yard back o' our house, en he was sech er sight ter look at dat she mighty nigh went out'n 'er senses. He was all cut in de face, en his clothes en shoes was des hangin' ter 'im by strings, en his eyes was 'most poppin' out'n his head. He was starvin' ter death—hadn't had a bite t' eat since he run off. When she seed 'im it was about a hour by sun, en he begged 'er to fetch 'im some victuals. Gen'men, he was so hungry dat she say he licked her han's lak er dog, en cried en tuck on powerful. She come home en told me, en ax me what ter do. Gen'men, 'fo' God on high I want ter do my duty ter my race en also to de white, but I couldn't see any safe way ter meddle. De white folks, some of 'em, anyway, say dat we aid en encourage crimes 'mongst our people, en while my heart was bleedin' fer dat boy en his folks, I couldn't

underhanded he'p 'im widout goin' ter de men in power accordin' ter law."

"And you did right," spoke up the minister. "As much as I pity the boy, I would have acted as you have done. He is accused of murder and is an escaped prisoner. To decide that he was innocent and help him escape is exactly what we are blaming his pursuers for doing—taking the law into hands not sanctioned by authority. There is only one thing that can decide the matter, and that is the decision of a judge and jury."

"Dat's exactly de way I looked at it," said Black, "en so I tol' my wife not ter go nigh 'im ergin. I knowed dis meetin' was up fer ter-night, en I des thought I'd fetch it here en lay it 'fo' you all en take er vote on it."

"A good idea," said the minister from his chair. "And, brethren, it seems to me we, as a body of representative negroes of this town, have now a golden opportunity to prove our actual sincerity to the white race. As you say, Brother Black, we have been accused of remaining inactive when a criminal was being pursued for crimes against the white people. If we can agree on it to a unit, and can turn the prisoner over now that all efforts of the whites to apprehend him have failed, our act will be flashed all round the civilized world and give the lie to the charge in question. Do you think, Brother Black, that Pete Warren is still hiding near your house?"

"Yes, I do," answered the barber. "He would be afeard ter leave dat place, en I reckon he's waitin' dar now fer my wife ter fetch 'im some'n' ter eat."

"Well, then, all we've got to do is to see if we can

thoroughly agree on the plan proposed. I suppose one of the first things, if we do agree to turn him over to the law, is to consult with Mr. Carson Dwight and see if he can devise a way of acting with perfect safety to the prisoner and all concerned. If he can, our duty is clear."

"Yes, he's de man, God knows dat," Black said, enthusiastically. "He won't let us run no risk."

"Well, then," said the minister, who had the floor, "let us put it to a vote. Of course, it must be unanimous. We can't act on a thing as dangerous as this without a thorough agreement. Now, you have all heard the plan proposed. Those in favor make it known by standing up as quietly as you possibly can, so that I may count you."

Very quietly, for so many acting in concert, men on all sides of the hall stood up. The minister then began to grope round the room, touching with his hands the standing voters.

"Who's this?" he suddenly exclaimed, when he reached Neb Wynn's chair and lowered his hands to the drayman, who was the only one not standing.

"It's me," Neb answered; "me, dat's who—*me!*"

"Oh!" There was an astonished pause.

"Yes, it's me. I ain't votin' yo' way," Neb said. "You all kin act fer yo'selves. I know what I'm about."

"But what's de matter wid you?" Buck Black demanded, rather sharply. "All dis time you been de most anxious one ter do some'n', en now when we got er chance ter act wid judgment en caution, all in a body, en, as Brother Hardcastle say, ter de honor of ou' race, why you up en—"

"Hold on, des keep yo' shirt on!" said Neb, in a queer, tremulous voice. "Gen'men, I ain't placed des zactly de same es you-all is. I don't want ter tek de whole 'sponsibility on my shoulders, en I don't intend to."

"You are not taking it all on your shoulders, brother," said the minister, calmly; "we are acting in a body."

"No, it's all on *me*," Neb said. "You said, Buck Black, dat Pete was in de lumber-yard 'hind yo' house. He ain't. You might search ever' stack o' planks en ever' dry-kiln dar, but you wouldn't fin' 'im. He's a cousin er my wife's, en me'n dat boy was good, true friends, en so he come here des now, when you heard my wife call me, an' th'owed hisse'f on my mercy. He's out at my stable now, up in de hay-loft, waitin' fer me ter fetch 'im suppin ter eat, as soon as you all go off. My wife say he's de most pitiful thing dat God ever made, en, gen'men, I'm sorry fer 'im. Law or no law, I'm sorry *fer* 'im. It's all well enough fer you ter set here in yo' good clothes wid good meals er victuals inside o' you, en know you got er good safe baid ter go ter—it's all well enough fer you ter vote on what is ter be done, but ef you *do* vote fer it en clap 'im 'hind de bars en he's hung—hung by de neck till he's as stiff es a bone, you'll be helpin' ter do it. Law is one thing when it's law, it's another thing when it ain't fit ter spit on. You all talk *jestice*, *jestice*, en you think it would be er powerful fine thing ter prove ter de worl' how honest you all is by handin' dat po' yaller dog over to de law. Put yo'selves in Pete's shoes an' you wouldn't be so easy ter vote yo'selves 'hind de

bars. You'd say de bird in de han' is wuth three in de bush, en you'd stay away fum de white man's court-house. De white men say deirselves dat dar ain't no jestice, en dey's right. Carson Dwight is er good lawyer, en he'd fight till he drapped in his tracks, but de State solicitor would rake up enough agin Pete Warren to keep de jury's blood b'ilin'. Whar'd dey git a jury but fum de ranks o' de very men dat's chasin' Pete lak er rabbit now? Whar'd dey git a jury dat ud believe in his innocence when dey kin prove dat he done threatened de daid man? No whar in dis State. No innocent nigger's ever been hung, hein? No innocent nigger's in de chain gang, hein? Huh, dey as thick dar es fleas."

When Neb had ceased speaking not a voice broke the stillness of the room for several minutes, then the minister said, with a deep-drawn breath: "Well, there is really no harm in looking at all sides of the question. The very view you have taken, Brother Wynn, may be the one that has really kept colored people from being more active in the legal punishment of their race. But it seems to me that it would only be fair, since you say Pete Warren is near, for him to be told of the situation and left to decide for himself."

"I'm willin' ter do dat, God knows," said Neb, "en ef y'all say so, I'll fetch 'im here en you kin splain it ter 'im."

"I'm sure that will be best," said Hardcastle. "Hurry up. To save time, you might bring his food here—that is, if your wife has not taken it to him."

"No, she was afeard ter go out dar. I'll mek 'er fetch it up here while I go after him. It may tek

time, fer he may be afeard to come in. But ef I tell 'im de grub's here, I bound you he'll come a-hustlin'."

They heard Neb's voice below giving instructions to his wife, and then the outer door in the rear was opened and closed. Presently a step was heard on the stair, and they held their breaths expectantly, but it was only Neb's wife with a tray of food. Gropingly she placed it on a little table, which she softly dragged from a corner into the centre of the room, and without a word retired. A door below creaked on its hinges; steps shambling and unsteady resounded hollowly from the floor beneath, and Neb's urgent, pacific voice rose to the tense ears of the listeners.

"Come on; don't be a baby, Pete!" they heard Neb say. "Dey all yo' friends en want ter he'p you out'n yo' trouble ef dey kin."

"Whar dat meat? whar it? oh, God! whar it?" It was the voice of the pursued boy, and it had a queer, uncanny sound that all but struck terror to the hearts of the listeners.

"She lef' it up dar whar dey all is," Neb said; "come on! I'll give it to you!"

That seemed to settle the matter, for the clambering steps drew nearer; and then two figures slightly denser than the darkness came into the room.

"Wait; let me git you er chair," Neb said.

"Whar it? whar it? my God! whar dat meat?" Pete cried, in a harsh, rasping voice.

"Whar'd she put it?" Neb asked. "Hanged ef I know."

"On the table," said Hardcastle.

Neb reached out for the tray and had barely

touched it, when Pete sprang at him with a sound like the snarl of an angry dog. The tray fell with a crash to the floor and the food with it.

"There!" Neb exclaimed; "you did it."

Then the spectators witnessed a pitiful, even repulsive scene, for the boy was on the floor, a big bone of ham in his clutch. For a moment nothing was heard except the snuffling, gulping, crunching sound that issued from Pete's nose, mouth, and jaws. Then a noise was heard below. It was a sharp rapping on the outer door.

"Sh!" Neb hissed, warningly; but there was no cessation of the ravenous eating of the starving negro. Neb cautiously looked out of the window, allowing only his head to protrude over the window-sill. "Who dar?" he called out.

"Me, Neb; Jim Lincum," answered the negro below. "You told me ef I heard any news over my way ter let you know."

"Oh yes," said Neb.

"Folks think Pete done lef' de woods, Neb. De mob done scattered ter hunt all round de country. A gang of 'em was headed dis way at sundown."

"Oh, dat so?" Neb said; "well we done gone ter baid, Jim, or I'd open de do' en let you have er place ter sleep."

"Don't want no place ter sleep, Neb," was the answer, in a half-humorous tone. "Don't want ter sleep nowhar 'cep' on my laigs sech times as dese. Er crowd er white men tried ter nab me while I was in my cotton-patch at work dis mawnin' but I made myse'f scarce. Dey hot en heavy after Sam Dudlow;

some think he had er hand in de killin'. Dey cayn't find dat nigger, dough."

"Well, good-night, Jim. I got ter git some rest," and Neb drew his head back and lowered the window-sash.

"Jim's all right," he said, "but I couldn't tek 'im in here. Dem men may 'a' been followin' 'im on de sly."

He advanced to the middle of the room and stood over the crouching figure still noisily eating on the floor.

"Pete, Brother Hardcastle got suppin ter 'pose ter you, en we 'ain't got any too much time. We goin' ter tell you 'bout it an leave it ter you. One thing certain, you ain't safe hidin' out like you is, en nobody ain't safe dat he'ps hide you, so I say suppin got ter be done in yo' case."

"I want y'all ter sen' fer Marse Carson," Pete mumbled, between his gulps. "He kin fix me ef anybody kin."

"That's what we were about to propose, Pete," said the preacher. "You see—"

"Sh!" It was Neb's warning hiss again. All was silence in the room; even Pete paused to listen. It was the low drone of human voices, and many in number, immediately below. A light from a suddenly exposed lantern flashed on the walls. Neb approached the window, but afraid even cautiously to raise the sash, he stood breathless. Then through his closed teeth came the words: "We are caught; gen'men, we in fer it certain en sho! Dey done tracked us down!"

There was a loud rapping on the door below, a

stifled scream from Neb's wife at the foot of the stairs, and then a sharp, commanding voice sounded outside.

"Open up, Neb Wynn!" it said. "We are onto your game. Some devilment is in the wind and we are going to know what it is."

Neb suddenly and boldly threw up the sash and looked out. "All right, gen'men, don't bre'k my new lock. I'll be down dar in er minute." Then quickly turning to Pete, he bent and drew him up. "Mak' er bre'k fer dat winder back dar, slide down de shed-roof, en run fer yo' life. Run!"

There was a great clatter of chairs and feet in the group of men, a crashing of a thin window-sash in the rear, a heavy, thumping sound on a roof outside, and a loud shout from lusty throats below.

"There he goes! Catch 'im! Head 'im off! Shoot 'im!"

Then darkness, chaos, and terror reigned.

XIX

WHILE these things were being enacted, Sanders, who had taken supper at Warren's, and Helen sat on the front veranda in the moonlight. Scarcely any other topic than Mam' Linda's trouble had been broached between them, though the ardent visitor had made many futile efforts to draw the girl's thought into more cheerful channels. It was shortly after ten o'clock, and Sanders was about to take his leave, when old Lewis emerged from the shadows of the house and was shambling along the walk towards the gate leading into the Dwight grounds, when Helen called out to him:

"Where are you going, Uncle Lewis?".

He doffed his old slouch hat and stood bare and bald, his smooth pate gleaming in the moonlight.

"I started over ter see Marse Carson, missy," he said, in a low, husky voice. "I knows good en well dat he can't do a thing, but Linda's been beggin' me ever since she seed him en Mr. Garner drive up at de back gate. She thinks maybe dey l'arnt suppin 'bout Pete. I knows dey hain't, honey, 'ca'se dey ud 'a' been over 'fo' dis. Dar he is on de veranda now—oh, Marse Carson! Kin I see you er minute, suh?"

"Yes, I'll be right down, Lewis," Carson answered, leaning over the railing.

As he came out of the house and approached across the grass, Sanders and Helen went to meet him. He bowed to Helen and nodded coldly to Sanders, to whom he had barely been introduced, and then with a furrowed brow he stood and listened as the old man humbly made his wants known.

"I'm sorry to say I haven't heard a thing, Uncle Lewis," he said. "I'd have been right over to see Mam' Linda if I had. So far as I can see, everything is just the same."

"Oh, young marster, I don't know what I'm ergoin' ter do," the old negro groaned. "I don't see how Linda's gwine ter pass thoo another night. She's burnin' at de stake, Marse Carson, but thoo it all she blesses you, suh, fer tryin' so hard. My Gawd, dar she come now; she couldn't wait."

He hastened across the grass to where the old woman stood, and caught hold of her arm.

"Whar Marse Carson? Whar young marster?" Linda cried, and then, catching sight of the trio, she tottered unaided towards them.

"Oh, young marster, I can't stan' it; I des *can't!*" she groaned, as she caught Dwight's hand and clung to it. "I am a mother ef I *am* black, an' dat my onliest child. My onliest child, young marster, en de po' boy is 'way over in dem mountains starvin' ter death wid dem men en dogs on his track. Oh, young marster, ol' Mammy Lindy is cert'nly crushed. Ef I could see Pete in his coffin I could put up

wid it, but dis here—dis here"—she struck her great breast with her hand—"dis awful pain! I can't stan' it—I des can't!"

Carson lowered his head. There was a look of profound and tortured sympathy on his strong face. Garner came out of the house smoking a cigar and strolled across the grass towards them, but observing the situation he paused at a flowering rose-bush and stood looking down the moonlit street towards the court-house and grounds dimly outlined in the distance. Garner had never been considered very emotional; no one had ever detected any indications of surprise or sorrow in his face. He simply stood there to-night avoiding contact with the inevitable. As a criminal lawyer he had been obliged to inure himself to exhibitions of mental suffering as a physician inures himself to the presence of physical pain, and yet had Garner been questioned on the matter, he would have admitted that he admired Carson Dwight for the abundant possession of the very qualities he lacked. He positively envied his friend to-night. There was something almost transcendental in the heart-wrung homage the old woman was paying Carson. There was something else in the fact that the wonderful tribute to courage and manliness was being paid there without reservation or stint before the (and Garner chuckled) very eyes of the woman who had rejected Carson's love, and in the very presence of the masculine incongruity (as Garner viewed him) by her side. All the display of emotion, *per se*, had no claims on Garner's interest, but the sheer, magnificent play of it, and its palpable clutch on things of the past and possible events of

the future, held him as would the unfolding evidence in an important law case.

"But oh, young marster," old Linda was saying; "thoo it all you been my stay en comfort; not even God's been as good ter me as you have; you tried ter he'p po' ol' Lindy, but de Lawd on high done deserted her. Dar ain't no just, reasonable God dat will treat er po' old black 'oman es I'm treated, honey. In slavery en out I've done de best—de very best I could fer white en black, en now as I stan' here, after er long life, wid my feet in de grave, I don't deserve ter be punished wid dis slow fire. Go ter de white 'omen er dis here big Newnited States en ax' 'em how dey would feel in my fix. Ef de mothers in dis worl' could see me ter-night en read down in my heart, er river of tears would flow fer me. Dat so, en' yet de God I've prayed ter-night en mornin', in slavery en out, has turned His back on me. I've prayed, young marster, till my throat is sore, till now I hain't got no strength nor faith lef' in me, en—well, here I stand. You all see me."

Without a word, his face wrung with pain, Carson clasped her hand, and bowing to Helen and her companion he moved away and joined Garner.

"It was high time you were getting out of that," Garner said, as he pulled at his cigar and drew his friend back towards the house. "You can do nothing, and letting Linda run on that way only works her up to greater excitement. But say, old man, what's the matter with you?"

Carson was white, and the arm Garner had taken was trembling.

"I don't know, Garner, but I simply can't stand

anything like that," Dwight said, his eyes on the group they had left. "It actually makes me sick. I—I can't stand it. Good-night, Garner; if you won't sleep here with me, I'll turn in. I—I—"

"Hush! what's that?" Garner interrupted, his ear bent towards the centre of the town.

It was a loud and increasing outcry from the direction of Neb Wynn's house. Several reports of revolvers were heard, and screams and shouts: "Head 'im off! Shoot 'im! There he goes!"

"Great God!" Garner cried, excitedly; "do you suppose it is—"

He did not finish, for Carson had raised his hand to check him and stood staring through the moonlight in the direction from which the sounds were coming. There were now audible the rapid and heavy foot-falls of many runners. On they came, the sound increasing as they drew nearer. They were only a few blocks distant now. Carson cast a hurried glance towards the Warren house. There, leaning on the fence, supported by Helen and Lewis, stood Linda, silent, motionless, open-mouthed. Sanders stood alone, not far away. On came the rushing throng. They were turning the nearest corner. Somebody, or something, was in the lead. Was it a man, an animal, a mad dog, a—

On it came forming the point of a human triangle. It was a man, but a man doubled to the earth by fatigue and weakness, a man who ran as if on the point of sprawling at every desperate leap forward. His hard breathing now fell on Carson's ears.

"It's Pete!" he said, simply.

Garner laid a firm hand on his friend's arm.

"Now's the time for you to have common-sense," he said. "Remember, you have lost all you care for by this thing—don't throw your very life into the damned mess. By God, you *sha'n't!* I'll—"

"Oh, Marse Carson, it's Pete!" It was Linda's voice, and it rang out high, shrill, and pleading above the roar and din. "Save 'im! Save 'im!"

Dwight wrenched his arm from the tense clutch of Garner and dashed through the gate, and was out in the street just as the negro reached him and stretched out his arms in breathless appeal and fell sprawling at his feet. The fugitive remained there on his knees, his hands clutching the young man's legs, while the mob gathered round.

"He's the one!" a hoarse voice exclaimed. "Kill 'im! Burn the black fiend!"

Standing pinioned to the ground by Pete's terrified clutch, Carson raised his hands above his head. "Stop! Stop! Stop!" he kept crying, as the crowd swayed him back and forth in their effort to lay hold of the fugitive who was clinging to his master with the desperate clutch of a drowning man.

"Stop! Listen!" Carson kept shouting, till those nearest him became calmer, and forming a determined ring, pressed the outer ones back.

"Well, listen!" these nearest cried. "See what he's got to say. It's Carson Dwight. Listen! He won't take up for him; he's a white man. He won't defend a black devil that—"

"I believe this boy is innocent!" Carson's voice rang out, " and I plead with you as men and fellow-citizens to give me a chance to prove it to your fullest satisfaction. I'll stake my life on what I say. Some

of you know me, and will believe me when I say I'll put up every cent I have, everything I hold dear on earth, if you will only give me the chance."

A fierce cry of opposition rose in the outskirts of the throng, and it passed from lip to lip till the storm was at its height again. Then Garner did what surprised Carson as much as anything he had ever seen from that man of mystery.

"Stop! Listen!" Garner thundered, in tones of such command that they seemed to sweep all other sounds out of the tumult. "Let's hear what he's got to say. It can do no harm! Listen, boys!"

The trick worked. Not three men in the excited mob associated the voice or personality with the friend and partner of the man demanding their attention. The tumult subsided; it fell away till only the low, whimpering groans of the frightened fugitive were heard. There was a granite mounting-block on the edge of the sidewalk, and feeling it behind him: Carson stood upon it, his hands on the woolly pate of the negro still crouching at his feet. As he did so, his swift glance took in many things about him: he saw Linda at the fence, her head bowed upon her arms as if to shut out from her sight the awful scene; near her stood Lewis, Helen, and Sanders, their expectant gaze upon him; at the window of his mother's room he saw the invalid clearly outlined against the lamplight behind her. Never had Carson Dwight put so much of his young, sympathetic soul into words. His eloquence streamed from him like a swollen torrent of logic. On the still night air his voice rose clear, firm, confident. It was no call

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to them to be merciful to the boy's mother bowed there like a thing cut from stone, for passion like theirs would have been inflamed by such advice, considering that the fugitive was charged with having slain a woman. But it was a calm call to patriotism. Carson Dwight plead with them to let their temperate action that night say to all the world that the day of unbridled lawlessness in the fair Southland was at an end. Law and order on the part of itself was the South's only solution of the problem laid like another unjust burden on a sorely tried and suffering people.

"Good, good! That's the stuff!" It was the raised voice of the adroit Garner, under his broad-brimmed hat in the edge of the crowd. "Listen, neighbors; let him go on!"

There was a fluttering suggestion of acquiescence in the stillness that followed Garner's words. But other obstacles were to arise. A clatter of galloping horses was heard round the corner on the nearest side street, and three men, evidently mountaineers, rode madly up. They reined in their panting, snorting mounts.

"What's the matter?" one of them asked, with an oath. "What are you waiting for? That's the damned black devil."

"They are waiting, like reasonable human beings, to give this man a chance to establish his innocence," Carson cried, firmly.

"They are, damn you, are they?" the same voice retorted. There was a pause; the horseman raised his arm; a revolver gleamed in the moonlight; there was a flash and a report. The crowd saw Carson

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Dwight suddenly lean to one side and raise his hands to the side of his head."

"My God, he's shot!" Garner called out. "Who fired that gun?"

For an instant horrified silence reigned; Carson still stood pressing his hands to his temple.

No one spoke; the three restive horses were rearing and prancing about in excitement. Garner made his way through the crowd, elbowing them right and left, till he stood near the fugitive and his defender.

"A good white man has been shot," he cried out—"shot by a man on one of those horses. Be calm. This is a serious business."

But Carson, with his left hand pressed to his temple, now stood erect.

"Yes, some coward back there shot me," he said, boldly, "but I don't think I am seriously wounded. He may fire on me again, as a dirty coward will do on a defenceless man, but as I stand here daring him to try it again I plead with you, my friends, to let me put this boy into jail. Many of you know me, and know I'll keep my word when I promise to move heaven and earth to give him a fair and just trial for the crime of which he is accused."

"Bully for you, Dwight! My God, he's got grit!" a voice cried. "Let him have his way, boys. The sheriff is back there. Heigh, Jeff Braider, come to the front! You are wanted!"

"Is the sheriff back there?" Carson asked, calmly, in the strange silence that had suddenly fallen.

"Yes, here I am." Braider was threading his way towards him through the crowd. "I was trying to spot the man that fired that shot, but he's gone."

"You bet he's gone!" cried one of the two remaining horsemen, and, accompanied by the other, he turned and, they galloped away. This seemed a final signal to the crowd to acquiesce in the plan proposed, and they stood voiceless and still, their rage strangely spent, while Braider took the limp and cowering prisoner by the arm and drew him down from the block. Pete, only half comprehending, was whimpering piteously and clinging to Dwight.

"It's all right, Pete," Carson said. "Come on, we'll lock you up in the jail where you'll be safe."

Between Carson and the sheriff, followed by Garner, Pete was the centre of the jostling throng as they moved off towards the jail.

"What dey gwine ter do, honey?" old Linda asked, finding her voice for the first time, as she leaned towards her young mistress.

"Put him in jail where he'll be safe," Helen said. "It's all over now, mammy."

"Thank God, thank God!" Linda cried, fervently. "I knowed Marse Carson wouldn't let 'em kill my boy—I knowed it—I knowed it!"

"But didn't somebody say Marse Carson was shot, honey?" old Lewis asked. "Seem ter me like I done heard—"

Pale and motionless, Helen stood staring after the departing crowd, now almost out of view. Carson Dwight's thrilling words still rang in her ears. He had torn her very heart from her breast and held it in his hands while speaking. He had stood there like a God among mere men, pleading as she would have pleaded for that simple human life, and they had listened; they had been swept from their mad

purpose by the fearless sincerity and conviction of his young soul. They had shot at him while he stood a target for their uncurbed passion, and even then he had dared to taunt them with cowardice as he continued his appeal.

"Daughter, daughter!" her father on the upper floor of the veranda was calling down to her.

"What is it, father?" she asked.

"Do you know if Carson was hurt?" the Major asked, anxiously. "You know he said he wasn't, but it would be like him to pretend so, even if he were wounded. It may be only the excitement that is keeping him up, and the poor boy may be seriously injured."

"Oh, father, do you think—?" Helen's heart sank; a sensation like nausea came over her, and she reeled and almost fell. Sanders, a queer, white look on his face, caught hold of her arm and supported her to a seat on the veranda. She raised her eyes to the face of her escort as she sank into a chair. "Do you think—did he look like he was wounded?"

"I could not make out," Sanders answered, solicitously, and yet his lip was drawn tight and he stood quite erect. "I—I thought he was at first, but later when he continued to speak I fancied I was mistaken."

"He put his hands to his temple," Helen said, "and almost fell. I saw him steady himself, and then he really seemed stunned for a moment."

Sanders was silent. "I remember her aunt said," he reflected, in grim misery, his brows drawn together, "that she once had a sweetheart up here. *Is this the man?*"

XX

TEN minutes later, while they still sat on the veranda waiting for Carson's return, they saw Dr. Stone, the Dwights' family physician, alight from his horse at the hitching-post near by.

"I wonder what that means?" the Major asked. "He must have been sent for on Carson's account and thinks he is at home. Speak to him, Lewis."

Hearing his name called, Dr. Stone approached, his medicine-case in hand.

"Were you looking for Carson?" Major Warren asked.

"Why, no," answered the doctor, in surprise; "they said Mrs. Dwight was badly shocked. Was Carson really hurt?"

"We were trying to find out," said the Major. "He went on to the jail with the sheriff, determined to see Pete protected."

There was a sound of an opening door and old Dwight came out to the fence, hatless, coatless, and pale. "Come right in, doctor," he said, grimly. "There's no time to lose."

"Is it as bad as that?" Stone asked.

"She's dying, if I'm any judge," was the answer. "She was standing at the window and heard that pistol-shot and saw Carson was hit. She fell flat

on the floor. We've done everything, but she's still unconscious."

The two men went hastily into the room where Mrs. Dwight lay, and they were barely out of sight when Helen noticed some one rapidly approaching from the direction of the jail. It was Keith Gordon, and as he entered the gate he laid his hand on Linda's shoulder and said, cheerily, "Don't worry now; Pete is safe and the mob is dispersing."

"But Carson," Major Warren asked; "was he hurt?"

"We don't exactly know yet." Keith was now at Helen's side, looking into her wide-open, anxious eyes. "He wouldn't stop a second to be examined. He was afraid something might occur to alter the temper of the mob and wasn't going to run any risks. The crowd, fortunately for Pete, was made up mostly of towns-people. One man from the mountains, a blood relative of the Johnsons, could have kindled the blaze again with a word, and Carson knew it. He was more worried about his mother than anything else. She was at the window and he saw her fall; he urged me to hurry back to tell her he was all right. I'll go in."

But he was detained by the sound of voices down the street. It was a group of half a dozen men, and in their midst was Carson Dwight, violently protesting against being supported.

"I tell you I'm all right!" Helen heard him saying. "I'm not a baby, Garner; let me alone!"

"But you are bleeding like a stuck pig," Garner said. "Your handkerchief is literally soaked. And look at your shirt!"

"It's only skin-deep," Carson cried. "I was stunned for a moment when it hit me, that's all."

Helen, followed by her father and Sanders, advanced hurriedly to meet the approaching group. They gave way as she drew near, and she and Dwight faced each other.

"The doctor is in the house, Carson," she said, tenderly; "go in and let him examine your wound."

"It's only a scratch, Helen, I give you my word," he laughed, lightly. "I never saw such a squeamish set of men in my life. Even stolid old Bill Garner has had seven duck fits at the sight of my red handkerchief. How's my mother?"

Helen's eyes fell. "Your father says he is afraid it is quite serious," she said. "The doctor is with her; she was unconscious."

They saw Carson wince; his face became suddenly rigid. He sighed. "It may not be so well after all. Pete is safe for awhile, but if she—if my mother were to—" He went no further, simply staring blankly into Helen's face. Suddenly she put her hand up to his blood-stained temple and gently drew aside the matted hair. Their eyes met and clung together.

"You must let Dr. Stone dress this at once," she said, more gently, Sanders thought, than he had ever heard a woman speak in all his life. He turned aside; there was something in the contact of the two that at once maddened him and drew him down to despair. He had dared to hope that she would consent to become his wife, and yet the man to whom she was so gently ministering had once been her lover. Yes, that was the man. He was sure of it now. Dwight's attitude, tone of voice, and glance

of the eye were evidence enough. Besides, Sanders asked himself, where was the living man who could know Helen Warren and not be her slave forever afterwards?

"Well, I'll go right in," Carson said, gloomily. He and Keith and Garner were passing through the gate when Linda called to him as she came hastily forward, but Keith and Garner were talking and Carson did not hear the old woman's voice. Helen met her and paused. "Let him alone to-night, mammy," she said, almost bitterly, it seemed to Sanders, who was peering into new depths of her character. "*Your* boy is safe, but Carson is wounded—*wounded*, I tell you, and his mother may be dying. Let him alone for to-night, anyway."

"All right, honey," the old woman said; "but I'm gwine ter stay here till de doctor comes out en ax 'im how dey bofe is. My heart is full ter-night, honey. Seem 'most like God done listen ter my prayers after all."

Sanders lingered with the pale, deeply distraught young lady on the veranda till Keith came out of the house, passed through the gate, and strode across the grass towards them.

"They are both all right, thank God!" he announced. "The doctor says Mrs. Dwight has had a frightful shock but will pull through. Carson was right; his wound was only a scratch caused by the grazing bullet. But God knows it was a close call, and I think there is but one man in the State low enough to have fired the shot."

When Keith and Sanders had left her, Helen went with dragging, listless feet up the stairs to her room.

Lighting her lamp, she stood looking at her image in the mirror on her bureau. How strangely drawn and grave her features appeared! It seemed to her that she looked older and more serious than she had ever looked in her life.

Dropping her glance to her hands, she noted something that sent a thrill through her from head to foot. It was a purple smudge left on her fingers by their contact with Carson Dwight's wound. Stepping across to her wash-stand, she poured some water into the basin, and was on the point of removing the stain when she paused and impulsively raised it towards her lips. She stopped again, and stood with her hand poised in mid-air. Then a thought flashed into her brain. She was recalling the contents of the fatal letter of Carson's to her poor brother; the hot blood surged over her. She shuddered, dipped her hands, and began to lave them in the cooling water. Carson was noble; he was brave; he had a great and beautiful soul, and yet he had written that letter to her dead brother. Yes, she had openly encouraged Sanders, and she must be honorable. At any rate, he was a good, clean man and his happiness was at stake. Yes, she supposed she would finally marry him. She would marry him.

XXI

CARSON was slightly weakened by the loss of blood and the unusual tax on his strength, and yet, wearing a strip of sticking-plaster as the only sign of his wound, he was at the office betimes the next morning, anxious to make an early start into the arrangements for a hurried preliminary trial of his client. Garner, as, was that worthy's habit when kept up late at night, was still asleep in the den when Helen called.

Carson was at his desk, bending over a law-book, his pipe in his mouth, when, looking up, he saw her standing in the doorway and rose instantly, a flush of gratification on his face.

"I've come to see you about poor Pete," she began, her pale face taking on color as if from the heat of his own. "I know it's early, but I couldn't wait. Mam' Linda was in my room this morning at the break of day, sitting by my bed rocking back and forth and moaning."

"She's uneasy, of course," Carson said. "That's only natural of a mother placed as she is."

"Oh yes," Helen answered, with a sigh. "She was thoroughly happy last night over his rescue, but now you see she's got something else to worry about. She now wonders if he will be allowed a fair trial."

"The boy must have that," Carson said, and then his face clouded over and he held himself more erect as he glanced past her out at the door. "Is Mr. Sanders—did he come with you? You see, I met him on the way to your house as I came down."

"Yes, he's there talking over the trouble with my father," Helen made rather awkward answer. "He came in to breakfast, but—but I wasn't at the table. I was with Mam' Linda." And thereupon Helen blushed more deeply over the reflection that these last words might sound like intentional and even presumptuous balm to the sensitiveness of a rejected suitor.

"I was afraid he might be waiting on the outside," Carson said, awkwardly. "I want to show hospitality to a stranger in town, you know, but somehow I can't exactly do my full duty in his case."

"You are not expected to," and Helen had tripped again, as her fresh color proved. "I mean, Carson—" But she could go no further.

"Well, I am unequal to it, anyway," Carson replied, with tightening lips and a steady, honest stare. "I don't dislike him personally. I hold no actual grudge against him. From all I've heard of him he is worthy of any woman's love and deepest respect. I'm simply off the committee of entertainment during his stay."

"I—I—didn't come down to talk about Mr. Sanders," Helen found herself saying, as the shortest road from the trying subject. "It seems to me you ought to hate me. I have, I know, through my concern over Pete, caused you endless trouble and loss of political influence. Last night you did what no

other man would or could have done. Oh, it was so brave, so noble, so glorious! I laid awake nearly all night thinking about it. Your wonderful speech rang over and over in my ears. I was too excited to cry while it was actually going on, but I shed tears of joy when I thought it all over afterwards."

"Oh, that wasn't anything!" Dwight said, forcing a light tone, though his flush had died out. "I knew you and Linda wanted the boy saved, and it wasn't anything. I ran no risk. It was only fun—a game of football with a human pigskin snatched here and there by a frenzied mob of players. When it fell of its own accord at my feet, and I had laid hands on it, I would have put it over the line or died trying, especially when you and Sanders—who has beaten me in a grander game—stood looking on. Oh, I'm only natural! I wanted to win because—first, because it was your wish, and—because *that man was there.*"

Helen's glance fell to the ragged carpet which, clogged with the dried mud of a recent rain, stretched from her feet to the door. Then she looked helplessly round the room at the dusty, open bookshelves, Garner's disreputable desk strewn with pamphlets, printed forms of notes and mortgages, cigar-stubs, and old letters. Her eyes rested longer on the dingy, small-paned windows to which the cobwebs clung.

"You always bring up his name," she said, almost resentfully. "Is it really quite fair to him?"

"No, it isn't," he admitted, quickly. "And from this moment that sort of banter is at an end. Now, what can I do for you? You came to speak about Pete."

She hesitated for a moment. It was almost as if, after all she had said, that if the subject was to be dropped, hers, not his, should be the final word.

"I came to tell you that Mam' Linda and I have just left the jail. She was so wrought up and weak that I made Uncle Lewis take her home in a buggy. He says she didn't close her eyes all last night and this morning refused to touch her breakfast. Then the sight of Pete in his awful condition completely unnerved her. Did you get a good look at him last night, Carson—I mean in the light?"

"No." Dwight shrugged his broad shoulders. "But he looked bad enough as it was."

"The sight made me ill," Helen said. "The jailer let us go into the narrow passage and we saw him through the bars of the cell. I would never have known him in the world. His clothing was all in shreds and his face and arms were gashed and torn, his feet bare and bleeding. Poor mammy simply stood peering through at him and crying, 'My boy, my baby, my baby!' Carson, I firmly believe he is innocent."

"So do I," Dwight made prompt answer. "That is, I am reasonably sure of it. I shall know *positively* when I talk to him to-day."

"Then you will secure his liberty, won't you?" Helen asked, eagerly. "I promised mammy I'd talk to you and bring her a report of what you said."

"I am going to do everything in my power," Dwight said; "but I don't want to raise false hopes only to disappoint you and Linda all the more later."

"Oh, Carson, tell me what you mean. You don't seem sure of the outcome."

"You must try to look at the thing bravely, Helen," Dwight said, firmly. "There is more in it than an inexperienced girl like you could imagine. I think we can arrange for a trial to-morrow, but it seems often that it is while such trials are in progress that the people become most wrought up; and then, you know, to-day and to-night must pass, and—" He broke off, avoiding her earnest stare of inquiry.

"Go on, Carson, you can trust me, if I *am* only a girl."

"To tell you the truth," Dwight complied, "it is the next twenty-four hours that I dread most. That mob last night, it seems, was made up for the most part of men here in town, workers in the factories and iron-foundries—many of whom know me personally and have faith in my promises. If it were left with them I'd have little to fear, but it is the immediate neighbors of the dead man and woman, the members of the gang of White Caps who whipped Pete and feel themselves personally affronted by what they believe to be his crime—they are the men, Helen, from whom I fear trouble."

Helen was pale and her hands trembled, though she strove bravely to be calm.

"You still fear that they may rise and come—and—take—him—out—of—jail? Oh!" She clasped her hands tightly and stood facing him, a look of terror growing in her beautiful eyes. "And can't something be done? Mr. Sanders spoke this morning of telegraphing the Governor to send troops to guard the jail."

"Ah, that's it!" said Carson, grimly. "But who

is to take that responsibility on himself. I can't, Helen. It might be the gravest, most horrible mistake a man ever made, one that would haunt him to his very grave. The Governor, not understanding the pulse of the people here, might take the word of some one on the spot. Garner and I know him pretty well. We've been of political service to him personally, and he would do all he could if we telegraphed him, but—we couldn't do it. By the stroke of our pen we might make orphans of the children of scores of honest white men, and widows of their wives, for the bayonets and shot of a regiment of soldiers would not deter such men from what they regard as sacred duty to their families and homes. If the Governor's troops did military duty, they would have to hew down human beings like wheat before a scythe. The very sight of their uniforms would be like a red rag to a mad bull. It would be a calamity such as has never taken place in the State. I can't have a hand in that, Helen, and not another thinking man in the South would. I love the men of the mountains too well. They are turning against me politically because we differ somewhat, but I simply can't see them shot like rabbits in a net. Pete is, after all, only *one* — they are many, and they are conscientiously acting according to their lights. The machinery of modern law moves too slowly for them. They have seen crime triumphant too often to trust to any verdict other than that reached from their own reasoning."

"I see; I see!" Helen cried, her face blanched. "I don't blame you, Carson, but poor mammy; what can I say to her?"

"Do your best to pacify and encourage her," Dwight answered, "and we'll hope for the best."

He stood in the doorway and watched her as she walked off down the little street. "Poor, dear girl!" he mused. "I had to tell her the truth. She's too brave and strong to be treated like a child."

He turned back to his desk and sat down. There was a deep frown on his face. "I came within an inch of losing my grip on myself," his thoughts ran on. "Another moment and I'd have let her know how I am suffering. She must never know that—never!"

XXII

HALF an hour later Garner came in. He walked about the room, a half smile on his face, sniffing the air as if with unctuous delight, casting now and then an amused glance at his inattentive partner.

"What do you mean? What are you up to now?" Carson asked, slightly irritated over having his thoughts disturbed.

"She's been here," Garner answered. "She told me so just now, and I want to inhale the heavenly perfume she left in this disreputable hole. Good Lord, you don't mean that you let her see those rotten slippers of mine! If you'd been half a friend you'd have kicked them out of sight, but you didn't care; you've got on a clean collar and necktie, and that plaster on your alabaster brow would admit you to the highest realm of the elect—provided the door-keeper was a woman and knew how you got your ticket. Huh! I really don't know what will become of me if I associate with you much longer. Your conduct last night upset me. I turned in to bed about two o'clock. Bob Smith was doing night-work at the hotel, and he came in and had to be told the whole thing; and he'd no sooner got to bed than Keith came in, and Bob had to hear *his* version. I

had a corking dime novel, but it was too tame after the racket you went through. The *Red Avenger* I was trying to get interested in couldn't hold a candle, even in his bareback ride strapped to a wild mustang in a mad dash across a burning prairie, to your horse-block rescue act. What *you* did was *new*, and I was *there*. The burning prairie business has been overdone and the love interest in the *Red Avenger* was weak, while yours—*well!*"

Garner sat down in his creaking revolving-chair and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest.

"Mine?" Carson said, coldly. "I don't exactly see your point."

"Well, the love business was there all the same," Garner laughed, significantly; "for, thrilling as it all was, I had an eye to that. I couldn't keep from wondering how I'd have felt if I'd been in your place and had your chances."

"*My* chances!" Dwight frowned. It was plain that he did not like Garner's bold encroachments on his natural reserve.

"Yes, your chances, dang you!" Garner retorted, with a laugh. "Do you know, my boy, that as a psychological proposition, the biggest, most earnest, most credulous-looking ass on earth is the man who comes to a strange town to do his courting and has nothing to do but that one thing, at stated hours through the day or evening, while everybody around him is going about attending to business. I've watched that fellow hanging around the office of the hotel, kicking his heels together to kill time between visits, and in spite of all I've heard about his stability and moral worth I can't respect him. Hang

it, if I were in his place and wanted to spend a week here, I'd peddle cigars on the street—I'd certainly have *something* to occupy my spare time. But I'll be flamdoodled if you didn't give him something to think about last night. Of all things, it strikes me, that could make a man like that sick—sick as a dog at the very stomach of his hopes—would be to see a former sweetheart of his fair charmer standing under shot and shell in front of her ancestral mansion protecting her servants from a howling mob like that, and later to see the defender, with the step of a David with a sling, come traipsing back victorious in her cause, all gummed up with blood and fighting still like hell to keep his friends from choking him to death in sheer admiration. She and Sanders may be engaged, but I'll be dadblamed if I wouldn't be worried if I were in his place."

"I wish you would let up, Garner," Dwight said, almost angrily. "I know you mean well, but you don't understand the situation, and I have told you before that I don't like to talk about it."

"I *did* want to tell you how it was rubbed in on him this morning," Garner said, only half apologetically, "and if you don't care, I'll finish."

Carson said nothing. Spots of red were on his cheeks, and with a teasing smile Garner went on: "I had stopped to speak to her on the corner just now, when the Major and his Highness from Augusta joined us. The old man was simply bursting with enthusiasm over what you accomplished last night. According to the Major, you were the highest type of Southerner since George Washington, and the obtuse old chap kept turning to Sanders for his con-

firmation of each and every statement. Sanders was doing it with slow nods and inarticulate grunts, about as readily as a seasick passenger specifies items for his dinner, while Helen stood there blushing like a red rose. Well," Garner concluded, as he kicked off one of his untied shoes to put on a slipper, "it may be cold comfort to you, viewed under the search-light of all the gossip in the air, but your blond rival is so jealous that the green juice of it is oozing from the pores of his skin."

"It isn't fair to him to look at it as you are," Dwight said. "Under the same circumstances he could have taken my place."

"Under the same circumstances, yes," Garner grinned. "But it is circumstances that make things what they are in this world, and I tell you that fellow needs circumstances worse than any man I ever saw. He is worried. I stopped and watched him as he walked on with her, and I declare it looked to me like he kicked himself under his long coat at every step. Say, look! Isn't that Pole Baker across the street? The fellow behind the gray horse. Yes, that's who it is. I'll call him. He may have news from the mountains."

Answering the summons, Baker led his horse across the street to where the two friends stood waiting on the edge of the pavement.

"Have they heard of the arrest over there, Pole?" Garner asked.

"Yes," the farmer drawled out. "I was at George Wilson's store this morning, where a big gang was waiting for food supplies from their homes. Dan Willis fetched the report—by-the-way, fellows,

just between us three, I'll bet he was the skunk that fired that shot. I'm pretty sure of it, from what I've picked up from some of his pals."

"But what are they going to do?" Carson asked, anxiously.

"That's exactly what I come in town to tell you," answered the mountaineer. "They are taking entirely a new tack. A report has leaked out that Sam Dudlow was seen prowling about Johnson's just 'fore dark the night of the murder, and they are dead on his track. They are concentrating their forces to catch him, and, since Pete Warren is safe in jail, they say they are going to let 'im stay thar awhile anyway."

"Good!" Garner cried, rubbing his hands together. "We've got two chances, now, my boy—to prove Pete innocent at court or by their catching the right man. In my opinion, Dudlow is the coon that did the job, and I believe he did it alone. Pete is too chicken-hearted and he's been too well brought up. Now let's get to work. You go talk to the prisoner, Carson, and put him through that honeyfugling third degree of yours. He'll confess if he did it, and if he did, may the Lord have mercy on his soul! I won't help defend him."

"That's whar I stand," Pole Baker said. "It's enough trouble savin' *innocent* niggers these days without bothering over the guilty. Shyster lawyers tryin' to protect the bad ones for a little fee is at the bottom of all this lawlessness anyway."

XXIII

AS the prisoner's counsel, Carson had no difficulty in seeing him. At the outer door of the red brick structure, with its slate roof and dormer windows, Dwight met Burt Barrett, the jailer, a tall though strong young man, who had once lived in the mountains and had been a moonshiner, and was noted for his grim courage in any emergency.

"I understand the trial is set for to-morrow," he remarked, as he opened the outer door which led into a hallway at the end of which was the portion of the house in which he lived with his wife and children.

"Yes," Carson replied; "the judge has telegraphed that he will come without fail."

The jailer shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "I feel a sight better over it than I did last night. I understand that the mob is going to let us alone till they can catch Sam Dudlow; if they lay hands on that scamp they certainly will barbecue 'im alive. As for Pete, I can't make up my mind about him; he's a trifling nigger and no mistake. He's got a good, old-time mammy and daddy, and none of Major Warren's niggers have ever been in the chain-gang, but this boy has talked a lot and been in powerful bad company. If you can keep him out of the

clutch of the mob you may save his neck, but you've got a job before you."

"I want to ask what you think about putting a guard round the jail," Carson said, when they were at the foot of the stairs leading to the cells on the floor above.

"As far as I'm concerned, I hope you won't have it done," said Barrett. "To save your neck, you couldn't summon men that wouldn't be prejudiced agin the nigger, an' if the report went out that we had put a force on at the jail it would only make the mob madder, and make them act quicker. A hundred armed citizens wouldn't stop a lynching gang—not a shot would be fired by white men at white men, so what would be the use?"

"That's what the sheriff thinks exactly, Burt," Carson replied. "I presume the only thing to do is to treat the arrest as usual. I'm doing all I can to assure the people that there is to be a fair and speedy trial."

They had reached the top of the stairs and were near Pete's cell, when the jailer turned and asked, in an undertone, "Are you armed?"

"Why, no," Carson said, in surprise.

"Good Lord! I wouldn't advise you to go inside the cell then. I've known niggers to kill their best friends when they are desperate."

"I'm not afraid of this one," Dwight laughed. "I must get inside. I want to know the whole truth, and I can't talk to him through the grating. Is he in the cell on the right?"

"No, the first on the left; it's the only double-barred one in the jail."

In one corner of the fairly well lighted room stood a veritable cage, the sides, top and bottom consisting of heavy steel lattice-work. As the jailer was unlocking the massive door, Carson peered through one of the squares and a most pitiful sight met his eye, for at the sound of the key in the lock Pete, in his tatters and gashed and swollen face, had crouched down on his dingy blanket and remained there quaking in terror.

"Get up!" the jailer ordered, in a not unkindly tone; "it's Carson Dwight to see you."

At this the negro's face lighted up, his eyes blazed in the sudden flare of relief, and he rose quickly.

"Oh, Marse Carson, I was afeared—"

"Lock us in," Dwight said to the jailer; "when I'm through I'll call you."

"All right, you know him better than I do," Barrett said. "I'll wait below."

"Pete," Carson said, gently, when they were alone, "your mother says she wants me to defend you under the charge brought against you. Do you wish it, too?"

"Yasser, Marse Carson; but, Marse Carson, I don't know no mo' about dat thing dan you do. 'Fo' God, Marse Carson, I'm telling you de trufe. Lawsy, Marse Carson, you kin git me out o' here ef you'll des tell 'em ter let me go. Dey all know you, Marse Carson, en dey know none er yo' kind er black folks ain't er gwine ter do er nasty thing lak dat. Look how dey did las' night! Shucks! dey wouldn't er lef' enough o' my haar fer er hummin'-bird's nest, ef I hadn't got ter you in de nick er time. Dat pack er howlin' rapscallions was tryin' ter tear me

ter mince-meat when you fired off dat big speech en made 'em all feel lak crawlin' in holes. You tell 'em, Marse Carson—you tell de jailer ter le' me out. Dat man know you ain't no fool; he know you is de biggest lawyer in de Souf. Ain't I heard old marster say you gwine up, en up, en up, till you set in de jedge's seat in de cote? Las' night, when you 'gun on 'em, en let out dat way, I knowed I was safe, but I don't see what yo'-all waitin' fer; I want ter go home ter mammy, Marse Carson. Look lak she been sick, en she cried en tuck on here, en so did young miss. Marse Carson, *what's de matter wid me?* What I done? I ain't er bad nigger. Unc' Richmond, on de farm, tol' me 'twas 'ca'se I made threats ergin dat white man 'ca'se he whipped me. I did talk er lot, Marse Carson, but I never meant no harm. I was des er li'l' mad, en—"

"Stop, Pete!" There was a crude wooden stool in the cell and Carson sat down on it. His heart was overflowing with pity for the simple, trusting creature before him as he went on gently and yet firmly: "You don't realize it, Pete, but you are in the most dangerous position you were ever in. I am powerless to release you. You'll have to be taken to court and seriously tried by law for the crime of which you are charged. Pete, I'm going to defend you, but I can't do a thing for you unless you tell me the whole truth. If you did this thing you must tell me—*me*, do you understand. We are alone. No one can hear you, and if you confess it to me it will go no further. Do you understand?"

Dwight's glance was fixed on the floor. To this point he had steeled himself against a too impulsive

faith in the negro's words that he might logically satisfy himself beyond any doubt as to the innocence or guilt of his client. There was silence. He dared not look into the gashed face before him, dreading to read what might be written there by the quivering hand of self-condemnation. The sheer length of the ensuing pause sent cold darts of fear through him. He waited another moment, then raised his eyes to the staring ones fixed upon him. To his astonishment they were full of tears; the great, heavy lip of the negro was quivering like that of a weeping child.

"Why, Marse *Carson!*" he sobbed; "my God, I thought you knowed I didn't do it! When you tol' 'em all las' night dat I wasn't de right one, I thought you meant it. I never once thought you—*you* was gwine ter turn ergin me."

Carson restrained himself by an effort as he went on, still calmly, with the penetrating insistency of grim justice itself.

"Then do you know anything about it?" he asked; —"*anything at all?*"

"Nothing I could swear to, Marse Carson," Pete replied, wiping his eyes on his torn and sleeveless arm.

"Do you suspect anybody, Pete?"

"Yasser, I do, Marse Carson. Somehow, I b'lieve dat Sam Dudlow done it. I b'lieve it 'ca'se folks say he's run off; en what he run off fer lessen he's de one? Oh, Marse Carson, I 'lowed I was havin' er hard 'nough time lak it is, but ef *you* gwine jine de rest uv um en—"

"Stop; think!" Carson went on, almost sternly, so eager was he to get vital facts bearing on the situa-

tion. "I want to know, Pete, why you think Sam Dudlow killed the Johnsons. Have you any other reason except that he has left?"

Pete hesitated a moment, then he answered: "I think he de one, Marse Carson, 'ca'se one day while me'n him en some more niggers was loadin' cotton at yo' pa's warehouse, some un was guyin' me 'bout de stripes Johnson en Willis lef' on my back, en I was—I was shootin' off my mouf. I didn't mean er thing, Marse Carson, but I was talkin' too much, en Sam come ter me, he did, en said: 'Yo' er fool, nigger; yo' sort never gits even fer er thing lak dat. It's de kind dat lay low en do de wuk right.' En, Marse Carson, w'en I hear dem folks was daid I des laid it ter Sam, in my mind."

"Pete," Dwight said, as he rose to leave, "I firmly believe you are innocent."

"Thank God, Marse Carson! I thought you'd b'lieve me. Now, w'en you gwine let me out?"

"I can't tell that, Pete," Dwight answered, as cheerfully as possible. "You need a suit of clothes. I'll send you one right away."

"One er yo's, Marse Carson?" The gashed face actually glowed with the delight of a child over a new toy.

"I was going to order a new one," Carson answered.

"I'd ruther have one er yo's ef you got one you thoo with," Pete said, eagerly. "Dar ain't none in dis town lak dem you git fum New York. Is you quit wearin' dat brown checked one you got last spring?"

"Oh yes, you can have that, Pete, if you wish, and I'll send you some shoes and other things."

"My God! will yer, boss? Lawd, won't I cut er shine at chu'ch next Sunday! Say, Marse Carson, you ain't gwine ter let um keep me in here over Sunday, is you?"

"I'll do the best I can for you, Pete," the young man said, and when the jailer had opened the door he descended the stairs with a heavy, despondent tread.

"Poor, poor devil!" he said to himself. "He's not any more responsible than a baby. And yet our laws hold him, in his benighted ignorance, more tightly, more mercilessly than they do the highest in the land."

XXIV

DESPITE the news Pole Baker had brought to town regarding the disposition of the mountaineers to let justice take its formal trend in the case of the negro already arrested, as the day wore on towards its close the whole town took on an air of vague excitement. Men who now lived at Darley, but had been former residents of the country, and were supposed to know the temper and character of the aggrieved people, shook their heads and smiled grimly when the subject of Pete's coming trial was mentioned. "Huh!" said one of these men, who kept a small grocery store on the main street, "that nigger 'll never see the door of the court-house."

And that opinion grew and seemed to saturate the very garment of approaching night. The negroes at work in various ways about the business portion of the town left their posts early, and with no comment to the whites or even to their own kind, they betook themselves to their homes — or elsewhere. The negroes who had held the interrupted meeting at Neb Wynn's house had been all that day less in evidence than any of the others. The attempt to stimulate law and order, to meet the white race on common ground, had been crudely and yet sincerely

made. They had done all they could within their restricted limitations; it now behooved them personally to avoid the probable overflow of the coming crisis. Their meeting in secret, they feared, was not understood. The present prisoner, in fact, had to all appearances, at least, been knowingly harbored by them. To explain would be easy enough; convincing an infuriated, race-mad mob of their friendly, helpful intentions would be impossible. Hence it was that long-headed, now silent-tongued, Neb Wynn locked up his domicile, and with his wife and children stole through the darkest streets and alleys to the house of a citizen who had owned his father.

"Marse George," he said. "I want you ter take me'n my folks in fer ter-night."

"All right, Neb," the white man answered; "we've got plenty of room. Go round to the kitchen and get your suppers. I didn't know it was as bad as that, but it may be well to be on the safe side."

Just after dark Carson went home to supper. As he drew near the front gate he noticed that the Warren house was lighted both in the upper and lower portions and that a group of persons were standing on the veranda. He noticed the towering form of old Lewis and the bowed, bandanna-clad head of Linda, and with them, evidently offering consolation, stood Helen, the Major, Sanders, and Keith Gordon.

Carson was entering the gate when Keith through the twilight recognized him and signalled him to wait. And leaving the others Keith came over to him.

"I must see you, Carson," he said, in a voice that had never sounded so grave. "Can we go in? If Mam' Linda sees you she'll be after you. She's terribly upset."

"Come into the library," Carson said. "I see it's lighted. We'll not be disturbed there."

Inside the big, square room, with its simple furnishings and drab tints, Carson sank, weary from his nervous strain and loss of sleep, into an easy-chair and motioned his friend to take another, but Keith, nervously twirling his hat in his hands, continued to stand.

"It's awful, old man, simply awful!" he said. "I've been there since sundown trying to pacify that old man and woman, but what was the use?"

"Then she's afraid—" Carson began.

"Afraid? Good God! how could she help it? The negro preacher and his wife came to her and Lewis and frankly tried to prepare them for the worst. Uncle Lewis is speechless, and Linda is past the tear-shedding stage. Hand in hand the old pair simply pace the floor like goaded brutes with human hearts and souls bound up in them. Then Helen—the poor, dear girl! Isn't this a beautiful home-coming for her? I feel like fighting, and yet there's nothing to hit but empty, heartless air. I don't care if you know it, Carson." Keith sank into a chair and leaned forward, his eyes glistening with the condensed dew of tense emotion. "I don't deny it. Helen is the only girl I ever cared for. She's treated me very kindly ever since she discovered my feeling, and given me to understand in the sweetest way the utter hopelessness of my case, but I still feel the

same. I thought I was growing out of it, but seeing her sorrow to-day has shown me what she is to me —and what she always will be. I'll love her all my life, Carson. She's suffering terribly over this. She loves her old mammy as much as if they were the same flesh and blood. Oh, it was pitiful, simply pitiful! Helen was trying to pacify her just now, and the old woman suddenly laid her hand on her breast and cried out: 'Don't talk ter me, honey child, I nursed bofe you en Pete on dis here breast, an' dat boy's *me*—my own self, heart en soul, en ef God let's dem men hang 'im ter-night, I'll curse 'Im ter my grave.'"

"Poor old woman!" Carson sighed. "If it has to come to her, it would be better to have it over with. It would have been better if I had stood back last night and let them have their way."

"Oh no," protested Keith; "that's Linda's sole comfort. She hardly draws a breath that doesn't utter your name. She still believes that her only hope rests in you. She says you'll yet think of something—that you'll yet do something to prevent the thing. She cries that out every now and then. Oh, Carson, I don't amount to anything, but before God I can truthfully say that I'd give my life to have Linda talk that way about me—before Helen."

Carson groaned, his tense hands were locked like prongs of steel in front of him, his face was deathly pale. "You wouldn't like any sort of talk or idle compliments if you were bound hand and foot as I am," he said. "It's mockery. It's vinegar rubbed into my wounds. It's hell!"

He tore himself from his chair and began to stride about the room like a restless tiger in a cage. His walk took him into the hall utterly forgetful of the presence of his friend. There a colored maid came to him and said, "Your mother wants you, sir."

He stared at the girl blankly for a moment, then he seemed to pull himself together. "Has my mother heard—?"

"No, sir, your father told us not to excite her."

"All right, I'll go up," Carson said. "Tell Mr. Gordon, in the library, to wait for me."

"I was wondering if you had come," the invalid said, as he bent over her bed, took her hand, and kissed her. "I presume you have been very busy all day over Pete's case?"

"Yes, very busy, mother dear."

"And is it all right now? Your father tells me the trial is set for to-morrow. Oh, Carson, I'm very proud of you. I heard your speech last night, and it seemed to lift me to the very throne of God. Oh, you are right, you are right! It is our duty to love and sympathize with those poor creatures. They are still children in the cradles of their past slavery. They can't act for themselves. Their crimes are due chiefly to the lack of the guiding hands they once had. Oh, my son, your father is angry with you for spoiling your political chances by such a radical stand, but even if you lose the race by it, I shall be all the prouder of you, for you have shown that you won't sell yourself. I wish I could go to the courthouse to-morrow, but the doctor won't let me. He says I mustn't have another shock like that last

night, when I heard that shot, saw you reel, and thought you were killed. Son, are you listening?"

"Why, yes, mother. I—" His mind was really elsewhere. He had dropped her hand, and was standing with furrowed brow and tightly drawn lips in the shadow thrown by the lamp on a table near by and the high posts of the old-fashioned bedstead.

"I thought you seemed to be thinking of something else," said the invalid, plaintively.

"I really was troubled about leaving Keith downstairs by himself," Carson said. "Perhaps I'd better run down now, mother."

"Oh yes, I didn't know he was there. Ask him to supper."

"All right, mother," and he left the room with a slow step, finding Gordon on the veranda below fitfully puffing at a cigar as he walked to and fro.

"Helen called me to the fence just now," Keith said. "She's all broken to pieces. She is relying solely on you now. She sent you a message."

"Me?"

"Yes, with the tears streaming down her cheeks she simply said, 'Tell Carson that I am praying that he will think of some way to avert this disaster.'"

"She said that!" Carson turned and stared through the gathering shadows towards the jail. There was a moment's pause, then he asked, in a tone that was harsh, crisp, and rasping:

"Keith, could you get together to-night fifteen men who would stick to me through personal friendship and help me arrive at some decision as to—to what is best?"

"Twenty, Carson—twenty who would risk their lives at a word from you."

"They might have to sacrifice—"

"That wouldn't make a bit of difference; I know the ones you can depend on. You've got genuine friends, the truest and bravest a man ever had."

"Then have as many as you can get to meet me at Blackburn's store at nine o'clock. We may accomplish nothing, but I want to talk to them. God knows it is the only chance. No, I can't explain now. There is not a moment to lose. Tell Blackburn to keep the doors shut and let them assemble in the rear as secretly and quietly as possible."

"All right, Carson. I'll have the men there."

XXV

WHEN Carson reached the front door of Blackburn's store about nine o'clock that evening he found it closed. For a moment he stood under the crude wooden shed that roofed the sidewalk and looked up and down the deserted street. It was a dark night, and from the aspect of the heavy, troubled clouds high winds seemed in abeyance beyond the hills to the west. He was wondering how he had best make his presence known to his friends within the store, when he heard a soft whistle, and Keith Gordon, the flaring disk of a cigar lighting his expectant face, stepped out of a dark doorway.

"I've been waiting for you," he said, in a cautious undertone. "They are getting impatient. You see, they thought you'd be here earlier."

"I couldn't get away while my mother was awake," Carson said. "Dr. Stone was there and warned me not to leave at night. She can't stand any more excitement. So I had to stay with her. I read to her till she fell asleep. Who's here?"

"The gang and fully fifteen other trusty fellows—you'll see them on the inside, every man of them with a gun. At the last moment I heard Pole Baker was down at the wagon-yard, and I nabbed him."

"Good; I'm glad you did. Now let's go in."

"Not yet, old man," Keith objected. "Blackburn gave special orders not to open the door if any person was in sight. Let's walk to the corner and look around."

They went to the old bank building on the corner, and stood at the foot of the stairs leading up to the den. No one was in sight. Across the numerous tracks of the switch-yard hard by there was a steam flouring mill which ground day and night, and the steady puffing of the engine beat monotonously on their ears. In a red flare of light they saw the shadowy form of the engineer stoking the fire.

"Now the way is clear," said Keith; "we can go in, but I want to prepare you for a disappointment, old man."

Carson stared through the darkness as arm in arm they moved back to the store. "You mean—"

"I'll tell you, Carson. The meeting of these fellows to-night is a big proof of the—the wonderful esteem in which they hold you. No other man could have got them together at such a time; but, all the same, they are not going to allow you to—you see, Carson, they have had time to talk it over in there, and have unanimously agreed that to make any opposition by force would be worse than folly. Pole Baker brought some reliable news, reliable and terrible. Why, he told us just now—however, wait. He will tell you about it."

Giving a rap on the door that was recognized within, they were admitted by Blackburn, who stood back in the shadow and quickly closed the shutter and locked it again. In the uncertain

light of a lamp with a murky chimney, on the platform in the rear, seated on boxes, nail kegs, chairs, table, and desk, Dwight beheld a motley gathering of his friends and supporters. Kirk Fitzpatrick, the brawny, black-handed tinner, who had a jest for every moment, was there; Wilson, the shoemaker; Tobe Hassler, the German baker; Tom Wayland, the good-hearted drug clerk, whose hair was as red as blood; Bob Smith, Wade Tingle, and, nestled close to the lamp, and looking like a hunchback, crouched Garner, so deep in a newspaper that he was utterly deaf and blind to sounds and things around him. Besides those mentioned, there were several other ardent friends of the candidate.

"Well, here you are at last," Garner cried, throwing down his paper. "If I hadn't had something to read I'd have been asleep. I don't know any more than a rabbit what you intend to propose, but whatever it is, we are late enough about it."

Hurriedly Carson explained the cause of his delay and took the chair which the tinner, with the air of a proud inferior, was pushing towards him. As he sat down and the lamplight fell athwart his careworn face, the group was overwhelmed with sympathy and a strange, far-reaching respect they could hardly understand. To-night they were, more than usual, under the spell of that inner force which had bound them one and all to him and which, they felt, nothing but dishonor could break. And yet there they sat so grimly banded together against him that he felt it in their very attitudes.

"The truth is"—Garner broke the awkward pause —"we presume you got us together to-night to offer

open opposition — in case, of course, that the mob means harm to your client. That seems the only thing a body of men can do. But, my dear boy, there are two sides to this question. For reasons of your own, chief among which is a most beautiful principle to see the humblest stamp of man get justice — for these reasons you call on your friends to stand to you, and they will stand, I reckon, to the end, but it's for you, Carson, to act reasonably and think as readily of the interests of all of us as for those of the unfortunate prisoner. To meet that mob by opposition to-night would—well, ask Pole Baker for the latest news. When you have heard what he knows to be true, I am sure you will see the utter futility of any movement whatsoever."

All eyes were now turned on the gaunt mountaineer, who was sitting on an inverted nail keg whittling to a fine point a bit of wood which now and then he thrust automatically between his white front teeth.

"Well, Carson," he began, in drawling tones, "I lowed you-uns would want to know just how the land lays, and as I had a sort of underground way of gettin' at first-hand facts, I raked in all the information I could an' come on to town. I'd heard about how low your mother was, an' easy upset by excitement, an' so I didn't go up to your house. I met Keith, an' he told me I could see you at this meetin', an' so I waited. Carson, the jig is certainly up with that coon. No power under high heaven could save his neck. The report that was circulated this morning, was deliberately sent out to throw the authorities off their guard. Only about thirty men are still on Sam Dudlow's trail — the rest,

hundreds and hundreds, in bunches an' factions, each faction totin' a flag to show whar they hail from, an' all dressed in white sheets, is headed this way."

"Do you mean right at this moment?" Carson asked, as he started to rise.

Pole motioned to him to sit down.

"They won't be here till about twelve o'clock," he said. "They've passed the word about amongst 'em, and agreed to meet, so that all factions can take part, at the old Sandsome place, two miles out on the Springtown road. They will start from there at half-past eleven on the march for the jail. It will be after twelve before they get here. Pete's got that long to make his peace, but no longer. And right here, Carson, before I stop, I want to say that thar ain't a man in this State I'd do a favor for quicker than I would for you, but many of us here to-night are family men, and while that nigger may, as you think, be innocent, still his life is just one life, while —well"—Baker snapped his dry fingers with a click that was as sharp as the cocking of a revolver—"I wouldn't give *that* for our lives if we opposed them men. They are as mad as wounded wild-cats. They believe he done it; they know on reliable testimony that he said he'd kill Johnson; an' they want his blood. Five hundred such as we are wouldn't halt 'em a minute. I want to help, but I'm tied hand an' foot."

There was silence after Pole's voice died away. Then Garner rapped on the table with his small hand and tossed back the long, thick hair from his massive brow.

"You may as well know the truth, Carson," he said, calmly. "We put it to a vote just before you came, and we all agreed that we would—well, try to bring you round to some sort of resignation; try to get you to throw it off your mind and stop worrying."

To their surprise Carson took up the lamp and rose. "Wait a moment," he said, and with the lamp in hand he crossed the elevated part of the floor and went down the steps into the cellar. They were left in darkness for a moment, the rays of the lamp flashing now only on the front wall and door of the long building.

"Huh, there ain't anybody hiding there!" Blackburn cautiously called out. "I looked through the full length of it, turned over every box and barrel, before you came. I wasn't going to run any risk of having a stray tramp in a caucus like this."

There was some fixed quality in Dwight's drawn face as he emerged, carrying the lamp before him, ascended the steps, and again took his place at the table.

"You thought somebody might be hiding there," the store-keeper said; "but I was careful to—"

"No, it wasn't that," Carson said. "I was wondering—I was trying to think—"

He paused as if submerged in thought, and Garner turned upon him almost sternly. He had never before used quite such a harsh tone to his partner.

"You've gone far enough, Carson," he said. "There are limits even to the deepest friendship. You can't ask your best friends to make their wives widows and their children orphans in a blind effort

to save the neck of one miserable negro, even if he's as innocent as the angels in heaven. As for yourself, your heroism has almost led you into a cesspool of reckless absurdity. You have let that old man and woman up there, and Miss—that old man and woman, *anyway*—work on your sympathies till you have lost your usual judgment. I'm your friend and—"

"Stop! Wait!" Carson stood up, his hands on the edge of the table, the lamp beneath him throwing his mobile face into the shadow of his firm, massive jaw. "Stop!" he repeated. "You say you have given up. Boys, I can't. I tell you I *can't*. I simply can't let them kill that boy. Every nerve in my body, every pulsation of my soul screams out against it. I have set my heart on averting this horror. Ten years ago I could have gone to my bed and slept peacefully, as many good citizens of this town will to-night, under the knowledge that the verdict of mob law was to be executed, but in the handling of this case I've had a new birth. There is no God in heaven if—I say if—He has not made it *possible* for the mind and will of man to prevent this horror. There must be a way; there *is* a way, and if I could put my ideas into your brains to-night—my faith and confidence into your souls—we'd prevent this calamity and set an example for our fellows to follow in future."

"Your ideas into our brains!" Garner said, in a tone of amused resentment. "Well, I like that, Carson; but if you can see a ghost of a chance to save that boy's neck with safety to our own, I'd like to have you plug it through my skull, if you have to do it with a steel drill. At present I'm the senior member of the firm of Garner & Dwight, but I'll

take second place hereafter, if you can do what you are aiming at."

"I don't mean to reflect on your intelligences," Dwight went on, passionately, his voice rising higher, "but I *do* see a way, and I am praying God at this moment to make you see it as I do and be willing to help me carry it out."

"Blaze away, old hoss," Pole Baker piped up from his seat on the nail keg. "I'm not a nigger-lover by a long shot, but somehow, seeing how you feel about this particular one an' his connections, I'm as anxious to save 'im as if I owned 'im in the good old day an' his sort was fetchin' two thousand apiece. You go ahead. I feel kind o' sneakin', anyway, for votin' agin you while you was up thar nursin' yore sick mammy. By gum! you give me the end of a log I kin tote, an' I'll do it or break my back."

"I want it understood, Carson," said Wade Tingle at this juncture, "that I was only voting against our trying to stop that mob by force, and, to do myself justice, I was voting in the interests of the family men here to-night. God knows, if you can see any *other* possible way—"

"We have no time to lose," Carson said. "If we are to accomplish anything we must be about it. Gentlemen, what I may propose may, in a way, be asking you to make a sacrifice almost as great as that of open resistance. I am going to ask you, law-abiding citizens that you are, to break the law, as you understand it, but not law as the best wisdom of man intended it to be. This section is in a state of open lawlessness. The law I'm going to ask you

to break is already broken. The highest court might hold that we would be no better, in *fact*, than the army of law-breakers headed this way with the foam of race hatred on their lips, its insane blaze in their eyes that till recently beamed only in gentleness and human love. But I'm going to ask you to chose between two evils—to let an everlasting injustice be done at the hand of a hate that will drown in tears of regret in time to come, or the lesser evil of breaking an already broken law. You are all good citizens, and I tremble and blush over my audacity in asking you to do what you have never in any form done before."

Carson paused. Wondering silence fell on the group. Upon each face struggled evidences of an almost painful desire to grasp his meaning. That it was momentous no man there doubted. Even the ever equable Garner was shaken from his habitual stoic attitude, and with his delicate fingers rigidly supporting his great head he stared open-mouthed at the speaker.

"Well, well, what is it?" he presently asked.

"There is only one chance I see," and Dwight stood erect, his arms folded, and stepped back so that the light of the lamp fell full upon his tense features. The patch of sticking plaster stood out from his pale skin, giving his perspiring brow an uncanny look. "There is only one thing to do, my friends, and without your help I stand powerless. I suggest that we form ourselves into a supposed mob of disguised men, that we go ahead of the others to the jail, and actually *force Burt Barrett to turn the prisoner over to us.*"

"Great God!" Garner, stood up, and leaned on the table. "*Then* what—what would you do? Good Lord!"

Carson pointed steadily to the cellar-door and swallowed the lump of excitement in his throat. "I would, unseen by any one, if possible, bring him here and imprison him, in that cellar, guarded by us only till—till such a time as we could safely deliver him to a court of justice."

"By God, you *are* a wheel-hoss!" burst from Pole Baker's lips. "That's as easy as fallin' off a log."

"Do you mean to make Burt Barrett believe we are—are actually bent on lynching the negro?" demanded Keith Gordon, new-born enthusiasm bubbling from his eyes and voice.

"Yes, that would be the only way," said Carson. "Barrett is a sworn officer of the law, and his position is his livelihood. Even if we could persuade him to join us, it wouldn't be fair to him, for he would be shouldering more responsibility than we would. The only way is to thoroughly disguise ourselves and compel him to give in as he will be compelled by the others if we don't act first. I know he would not fire upon us."

"It looks to me like a dandy idea," spoke up Blackburn. "As for me I want to reward originality by doing the thing if possible. As for that cellar, it's as strong as an ancient fortress anyway and, Carson, Pete would not try to escape if you ordered him not to. As for disguises, I can lend you all the bleached sheeting you want. I got in a fresh bale of it yesterday. I could cut it into ten-yard pieces which would not hurt the sale of it. Remnants fetch a

better price than regular stuff anyway. Boys, let's vote on it. All in favor stand up."

There was a clatter of shoes and rattling of chairs, boxes, kegs and other articles which had been used for seats. It was an immediate and unanimous tribute to the sway Carson Dwight's personality had long held over them. They stood by him to a man. Even Garner suddenly, and strangely for his crusty individuality, relegated himself to the rank of a common private under the obvious leader.

"Hold on, boys!" exclaimed one not so easily relegated to any position not full of action, and Pole Baker was heard in a further proposal. "So far the arrangements are good and sound but you-uns haven't looked far enough ahead. When we git to the jail thar's got to be some darned fine talkin' of exactly the right sort, or Burt Barrett will smell a mouse and refuse our demands. In a case like this silence is a sight more powerful than a lot o' gab. Now, I propose to have one man, and one man *only* to do the talking."

"Yes, and you are the man," said Carson. "You must do it."

"Well, I'm willin'," agreed Baker. "The truth is, folks say I'm good at just that sort o' devilment, an' I'd sort o' like the job."

"You are the very man," Carson said, with a smile.

"You bet he is," agreed Blackburn. "Now come down in the store an' let me rig you spooks up. We haven't any too much time to lose."

"Thar's another thing you-uns don't seem to have calculated on," said Baker, as Blackburn was lead-

ing them down to the dry-goods counter. "It may take time to quiet public excitement, even if we put this thing through to-night. You propose to let the impression go out that thar was a lynchin'. How will you keep 'em from thinkin' it's a fake unless they see some'n' hangin' to a tree-limb in the mornin'? If they thought we'd put up a job on 'em, they would nose around till they was onto the whole business, an' then thar would be the devil to pay."

"You are right about that," said Garner. "If we could convince the big mob that Pete has been lynched in some secret way or place, by some other party, who don't want to be known in the matter, the excitement would die down in a day or so."

"A bang-up good idea!" was Pole's ultimatum. "Leave it to me and I'll study up some way to put it to Burt—by gum! How about tellin' 'im that, for reasons of our own, we intend to hide the body whar the niggers can't git at it to give it decent burial? I really believe that would go down."

"Splendid, splendid!" said Garner. "Work that fine enough, Pole, and it will give us more time for everything."

"Well, I can work it all right if I am to do the talkin'," Pole said, as he reached out for his portion of the sheeting.

XXVI

FIFTEEN minutes later a spectral group in all truth filed out through the rear door of the store and paused for further orders in the shadow of the wall of the adjoining bank building. The sky was still darkly overcast and a drizzle as fine as mist was in the air.

With Carson and Pole in the lead, the party marched grimly two and two, a weird sight even to themselves. Straight down the alley behind the stores along the railway they moved, keeping step like trained military men. Pole, for visual effect, carried a coil of new hemp rope, and he swung it about in his white, winglike clutch with the ease of a cow-boy, as he gutturally gave orders as to turns and tentative pauses. Now and then he would leave the others standing and stride ahead through the darkness and signal them to come on up. In this way they progressed with many a halt, and many a cautious détour to avoid the light that steadily gleamed through some cottage window or chink in a door or some watchman at his post at some mill or factory, till finally they reached the grounds surrounding the court-house and jail.

"I don't know how soft-hearted you are, Carson," Baker whispered in the young man's ear, "but

thar's one thing a man full of feelin' like you seem to be ought to be ready to guard against."

"What is that, Pole?"

"Why, you know, if we git the poor devil out he'll be sure he's done for, an' he'll be apt to raise an' awful row, beggin' an' prayin' an' no tellin' what else. But for all you do, don't open yore mouth. Let 'im bear it—tough as it will be—till we kin git to a safe place. Thar'll be folks listenin' in the houses along the way to the store, an' ef you was to speak one kind word the truth might leak out. To all appearances we are lynchers of the most rabid brand."

"I understand that, Pole," said Carson. "I won't interfere with your work."

"Don't call it *my* work," said Baker, admiringly. "I've been through a sight of secret things in my time, but I never heard of a scheme as slick an' deep-laid as this. If she goes through safe I'll put you at the top of my list. It looks like it will work, but a body never kin tell. Burt Barrett is the next hill to climb. I don't know him well enough to foresee what stand he'll take. Boys, have yore guns ready, an' when I order you to take aim, you do it as if you intend to make a hole in whatever is in front of you. Our bluff is the biggest that ever was thought of, but it has to go. Now, come on!"

Through the open gateway they marched across the public lawn covered with fresh green grass to the jail near by. A dog chained in a kennel behind the house waked and snarled, but he did not bark. There was a little porch at the entrance to the building, and along this the ghostly band silently arranged themselves.

"'WE'VE COME AFTER THAT NIGGER,' SAID BAKER"

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R L

"Hello in thar, Burt Barrett!" Pole suddenly cried out, in sharp, stern tones, and there was a pause. Then from the darkness within came the sound of some one striking a match. A flickering light flared up in the room on the right of the entrance; then the voice of a woman was heard.

"Burt, what is it?" she asked, in a startled tone.

"I don't know; I'll see," a coarser voice made answer. Another pause and a door on the inside was opened, then the heavier outer one, and Burt Barrett, half dressed, stood staring at the grewsome assemblage before him.

"We've come after that damned nigger," said Baker, succinctly, his tone so low in his throat that even an intimate friend would not have recognized it, and as he spoke he raised his coil of rope and tapped the floor of the porch.

Barrett, as many a brave man would have done in his place, stood helplessly bewildered. Presently he drew himself together and said, firmly:

"Gentlemen, I'm a sworn officer of the law. I've got a duty to perform and I'm going to do it." And thereupon they saw the barrel of a revolver which the jailer held in his hand. In the awful stillness that engulfed his words the click of its hammer, as the weapon was cocked, sounded sharp and distinct.

"Too bad, but he's goin' to act ugly, boys," Pole said, with grim finality. "He is a white man *in looks*, but he's j'ined forces with the black devils that are bent on rulin' our land. Steady, take aim! If thar's less'n twenty holes in his carcass when he's examined in the mornin' it will stand for some member's eternal disgrace. Aim careful!"

There was a startled scream at the half-open window of the bedroom on the right and the jailer's wife thrust out her head.

"Don't shoot 'im!" she screamed. "Don't! Give 'em the keys, Burt. Are you a fool?"

"He certainly looks it," was Baker's comment, in a tone of well-assumed only half-bridled rage. "Give 'im ten seconds to drap them keys, boys. I'll count. When I say ten blaze away, an' let a yawnin' hell take 'im."

"Gentlemen, I—"

"Burt! Burt! what do you mean?" the woman cried again. "Are you plumb crazy?"

"One!" counted Pole—"two!—three—"

"I want to do what's right," the jailer temporized. "Of course, I'm overpowered, and if—"

"Five!—six!" went on Pole, his voice ringing out clear and piercing.

There was a jingling of steel. The spectators, peering through ragged eye-holes in their white caps, saw the bunch of keys as it emerged from Barrett's pocket and fell to the doorstep.

"Gentlemen, you may live to be sorry for this night's work," he said.

"What do you care what we're sorry for," Pole said, grimly, "just so you ain't turned into a two-legged sifter? Now"—as he stooped to pick up the keys—"you git back in thar to yore wife an' children. We simply mean business an' know what we are about. An' look here, Burt Barrett"—Pole nudged Carson, who stood close to him—"thar'll be another gang here in a few minutes on the same business. You kin tell 'em we beat 'em to the hitchin'-post, an', moreover,

you kin tell 'em that we said that when we settle this nigger's hash them nor nobody else will ever be able to find hair or hide of 'im. A buryin' to the general run o' niggers is their greatest joy an' pride, but they'll never cut up high jinks over this one."

"Good, by Heaven!" Garner chuckled, as he recalled Pole's diplomatic suggestion at the store.

Without another word of protest the jailer receded into the house, leaving the door open, and, led by Pole, the others entered the hallway with a firm tread and mounted the stairs to the floor above. All was still here, and so dark that Baker lighted a bit of candle and held it over his head. Knowing the cell in which Pete was confined, Carson led them to its door. As they paused there and Pole was fumbling with the keys, a low, stifled scream escaped from the prisoner, and then, in the dim, checkered light thrown by the candle through the bars, they saw the negro standing close against the farthest grating. Pole had found the right key and opened the door.

"It's all up with you, Pete Warren," he said; "you needn't make a row. You've got to take your medicine. Come on."

"Oh, my God, my God!" cried the negro, as with great, glaring eyes he gazed upon them. "I never done it. I never done it. Don't kill me!"

"Bring 'im on, boys!" Pole produced an artificial oath with difficulty, for he really was deeply moved. "Bring 'im on!"

Two of the spectres seized Pete's hands just as his quaking knees bent under him and he was falling down. He started to pull back, and then, evidently

realizing the utter futility of resisting such an overwhelming force, he allowed himself to be led through the door of the cell and down the stairs into the yard.

"I never done it, before God I never done it!" he went on, sobbing like a child. "Don't kill me, white folks. Gi' me one chance. Tek me ter Marse Carson Dwight; he'll tell you I ain't de man."

"He'll tell us a lot!" growled Baker, with another of his mechanical oaths. "Dry up!"

"Oh, my God have mercy!" For the first time Pete noticed the coil of rope and the sight of it redoubled his terror. On his knees he sank, trying to cover his eyes with his imprisoned hands, and quivering like an aspen. Hardly knowing what he was doing, Carson Dwight impulsively bent over him, but before he had opened his lips the watchful Baker had roughly drawn him back.

"Don't, for God's sake!" the mountaineer whispered, warningly, and he pointed across the street to the houses near by. Indeed, as if to sanction his precaution, a window-sash in the upper story of the nearest house was raised, and a pale, white-haired man looked out. It was the leading Methodist preacher of the place. For one moment he stared down on them, as if struck dumb by the terror of the scene.

"In the name of Christ, our Lord, our Saviour, be merciful, neighbors," he said, in a voice that shook. "Don't commit this crime against yourselves and the community you live in. Spare him! In the name of God, hand him back to the protection of the law."

"The law be hanged, parson," Pole retorted, as

part of his rare rôle. "We are looking after that; thar hain't no law in this country that's wuth a hill o' beans."

"Be merciful—give the man a chance for his life," the preacher repeated. "Many think he is innocent!"

Hearing that plea in his behalf, Pete screamed out and tried to extend his hands supplicatingly towards his defender, but under Baker's insistent orders he was dragged, now struggling more desperately, farther down the street.

"Ah, Pole, tell the poor—" Keith Gordon began, when the mountaineer sharply commanded:

"Dry up! You are disobeyin' orders. Hurry up; bring 'im on. That other gang may hear this racket, and then—come on, I tell you! You violate my leadership and I'll have you court-martialled."

In some fashion or other they moved on down the street, now taking a more direct way to the store in the fear that they might be met by the expected lynchers and foiled in their purpose. They had traversed the entire length of the street leading from the court-house to the bank building, and were about to turn the corner to reach the rear door of the store, when, in a qualm of fresh despair, Pete's knees actually gave way beneath him and he sank limply to the sidewalk.

"Lord, I reckon we'll have to tote 'im!" Pole said. "Pick 'im up, boys, and be quick about it. This is a ticklish spot. Let one person see us and the game will be up."

Pete clearly misunderstood this, and seeing in the words a hint that help or protection was not far away, he suddenly opened his mouth and began to scream.

As quick as a flash Carson, who was immediately behind him, clapped his hand over his lips and said, "Hush, for God's sake, Pete, we are your friends!"

With his mouth still closed by the hand upon it, the negro could only stare into Carson's mask too terrified to grasp more than that he had heard a kindly voice.

"Hush, Pete, not a word! We are trying to save you," and Carson removed his hand.

"Who dat? Oh, my God, who dat talkin'?" Pete gasped.

"Carson Dwight," said the young man. "Now hush, and hurry."

"Thank God it you, Marse Carson—oh, Marse Carson, Marse Carson, you ain't gwine ter let um kill me!"

"No, you are safe, Pete."

In a rush they now bore him round the corner, and then pausing at the door of the store, to be certain that no extraneous eye was on them, they waited breathlessly for an order from their leader.

"All right, in you go!" presently came from Pole's deep voice, in a great breath of relief. "Open the door, quick!"

The shutter creaked and swung back into the black void of the store, and the throng pressed inward. The door was closed. The darkness was profound.

"Wait; listen!" Pole cautioned. "Thar might be somebody on the sidewalk at the front."

"Oh, my God, Marse Carson, is you here?" came from the quaking negro.

"Sh!" and Pole imposed silence. For a moment

they stood so still that only the rapid panting of the negro was audible.

"All right, we are safe," Baker said. "But, gosh! it was a close shave! Strike a light an' let's try to ease up this feller. I hated to be rough, but somebody had to do it."

"Yes, it had to be," said Dwight. "Pete, you are with friends. Strike a light, Blackburn, the poor boy is scared out of his wits."

"Oh, Marse Carson, what dis mean? what you-all gwine ter do ter me?"

Blackburn had groped to the lamp on the table and was scratching a match and applying the flame to the wick. The yellow light flashed out, and a strange sight met the bewildered gaze of the negro as kindly faces and familiar forms gradually emerged from the sheeting. Near him stood Dwight, and grasping his hand, Pete clung to it desperately.

"Oh, Marse Carson, what dey gwine ter do ter me?"

"Nothing, Pete, you are all right now," Carson said, as tenderly as if he were speaking to a hurt child. "The mob was coming and we had to do what we did to save you." He explained the plan of keeping him hidden in the cellar for a few days, and asked Pete if he would consent to it.

"I'll do anything you say, Marse Carson," the negro answered. "You know what's best fer me."

"I've got an old mattress here," Blackburn spoke up; "boys, let's get it into the cellar. It will make him comfortable."

And with no sense of the incongruity of their act, considering that as the sons of ex-slave-holders they

had never in their lives waited upon a negro, Wade Tingle and Keith Gordon drew the dusty mattress from a dry-goods box in the corner of the room and bore the cumbersome thing through the cellar doorway into the cobwebbed darkness beneath. Blackburn followed with a candle, indicating the best-ventilated spot for its placement. Thither Carson led his still benumbed client, who would move only at his bidding, and then like a jerky automaton.

"You won't be afraid to stay here, will you, Pete?" he asked.

The negro stared round him at the encroaching shadows in childlike perturbation.

"You gwine ter lock me in, Marse Carson?" he asked.

Carson explained that in a sense he was still a prisoner, but a prisoner in the hands of friends—friends who had pledged themselves to see that justice was done him. The negro slowly lowered himself to the mattress and stretched out his legs on the stone pavement. An utter droop of despair seemed to settle on him. From the depths of his wide-open eyes came a stare of dejection complete.

"Den I *hain't* free?" he said.

"No, not wholly, Pete," Carson returned; "not quite yet."

"Dry up down thar. Listen!" It was Baker's voice in a guarded tone as he stood in the cellar doorway.

The group around the negro held its breath. The grinding of footsteps on the floor over their heads ceased. Then from the outside came the steady tramp of many feet on the brick sidewalk, the clatter of horses' hoofs in the street.

"Sh! Blow out the light," Carson said, and Blackburn extinguished it. Profound darkness and stillness filled the long room. Like an army, still voiceless and grimly determined, the human current flowed jailward. It must have numbered several hundred, judged by the time it took to pass. The sound was dying out in the distance when Carson, the last to leave Pete, crept from the cellar, locked the door, and joined the others in the darkness above.

"That mob would hang every man of us if they caught on to our trick," said Baker, with a queer, exultant chuckle.

Carson moved past him towards the front door.

"Where you goin'?" Pole asked, sharply.

"I want to see how the land lies on the outside," answered Carson.

"You'll be crazy if you go," said Blackburn, and the others pressed round Dwight and anxiously joined in the protest.

"No, I must go," Dwight firmly persisted. "We ought to find out exactly what that crowd thinks to-night, so we'll know what to depend on. If they think a lynching took place they will go home satisfied; if not, as Pole says, they may suspect us, and the most godless riot that ever blackened human history may take place here in this town."

"He's right," declared the mountaineer. "Somebody ought to go. I really think I'm the man, by rights, an'—"

"No, I want to satisfy myself," was Dwight's ultimatum. "Stay here till I come back."

Blackburn accompanied him to the front door, cautiously looked out, and then let him pass through.

"Knock when you get back—no, here, take the key to the back door and let yourself in. So far, so good, my boy, but this is absolutely the most ticklish job we ever tackled. But I'm with you. I glory in your spunk."

There was a swelling murmuring, like the onward sweep of a storm from the direction of the court-house. Voices growing louder and increasing in volume reached their ears.

"Wait for me. Keep the lights out for all you do," Dwight said, and off he strode in the darkness.

In the gloom and stillness of the store the others waited his return, hardly daring to raise their voices above a whisper. He was gone nearly an hour, and then they heard the key softly turned in the lock and presently he stood in their midst.

"They've about dispersed," he said, in a tone of intense fatigue. "They lay it to the Hillbend faction, who had some disagreement with them to-day. They seem satisfied."

"Gentlemen"—it was Garner's voice from his chair at the table—"there's one thing that must be regarded as sacred by us to-night, and that is the *absolute* secrecy of this thing."

"Good Lord, you don't think any of us would be fool enough to talk about it!" exclaimed Blackburn, in an almost startled tone over the bare suggestion. "If I thought there was a man here who would blab this to a living soul, I'd—"

"Well, I only wanted to impress that on you all," said Garner. "To all intents and purposes we are law-breakers, and I'm a member of the Georgia bar. Where are you going, Carson?"

"Down to speak to Pete," answered Dwight. "I want to try to pacify him."

When he came back a moment later he said: "I've promised to stay here till daylight. Nothing else will satisfy him; he's broken all to pieces, crying like a nervous woman. As soon as I agreed to stay he quieted down."

"Well, I'll keep you company," said Keith. "I can sleep like a top on one of the counters."

"Hold on, there is something else," Carson said, as they were moving to the rear door. "You know the news will go out in the morning that Pete was taken off somewhere and actually lynched. This will be a terrible blow to his parents, and I want permission from you all to let those two, at least, know that—"

"No!" Garner cried, firmly, even fiercely, as he turned and struck the counter near him with his open hand. "There you go with your eternal sentiment! I tell you this is a grave happening tonight—grave for us and still graver for Pete. Once let that mob find out that they were tricked and they will hang our man or burn this town in the effort."

"I understand that well enough," admitted Dwight, "but the Lord knows we could trust his own flesh and blood when they have so much at stake."

"I am not willing to *risk* it, if you are," said Garner, crisply, glancing round at the others for their sanction. "It will be an awful thing for them to hear the current report in the morning, but they'd better stand it for a few days than to spoil the whole thing. A negro is a negro, and if Lewis and Linda knew the

truth they would be shouting instead of weeping and the rest of the darkies would suspect the truth."

"That's a fact," Blackburn put in, reluctantly. "Negroes are quick to get at the bottom of things, and with no dead body in sight to substantiate a lynching story they would smell a mouse and hunt for it till they found it. No, Carson, *real* weeping right now from the mammy and daddy will help us out more than anything else. Yes, they will have to bear it; they will be all the happier in the end."

"I suppose you are right," Dwight gave in. "But it's certainly tough."

XXVII

IT was just at the break of day the following morning. Major Warren, who had not retired until late the night before in his perturbed state of mind over the calamity which hovered in the air, was sleeping lightly, when he was awakened by the almost noiseless presence of some one in his room. Sitting up in bed he stared through the half darkness at a form which towered straight and still between him and the open window through which the first touches of the new day were stealing.

"Who's there?" he demanded, sharply.

"It's me, Marse William—Lewis."

"Oh, you!" The Major put his feet down to the rug at the side of his bed, still not fully awake. "Well, is it time to get up? Anything—wrong? Oh, I remember now—Pete!"

A groan from the great chest of the negro set the air to vibrating, but he said nothing, and the old gentleman saw the bald pate suddenly sink.

"Oh, Lewis, I hope—" Major Warren paused, unable to continue, so vast and grewsome were the fears his servant's attitude had inspired. The old negro took a step or two forward and then said:

"Oh, marster, dey done tuck 'im out las' night—dey tuck my po' boy—" A great sob rose in old Lewis's breast and burst on his lips.

"Really, you don't mean it—you can't, after—"

"Yasser, yasser; he daid, marster. Pete done gone! Dey killed 'im las' night, Marse William."

"But—but how do you know?"

"I des dis minute seed Jake Tobines; he slipped up ter my house en called me out. Jake lives back 'hind de jail, Marse William, en when de mob come him en his wife heard de racket en slipped out in de co'n-patch ter hide. He seed de gang, marster, wid his own eyes, en heard um ax fer de boy. At fus Marse Barrett refused ter give 'im up, but dey ordered fire on 'im en he let um have de keys. Jake seed um fetch Pete out, en heard 'im beggin' um ter spar' his life, but dey drug 'im off."

There was silence broken only by the old negro's sobs and the smothered effort he was making to restrain his emotion.

"And mammy," the Major began, presently; "has she heard?"

"Not yit, marster, but she is awake—she been awake all night long—on her knees prayin' most er de time fer mercy—she was awake when Jake come en she knowed I went out ter speak ter 'im, en when I come back in de house, marster, she went in de kitchen. I know what she done dat fur—she didn't want ter know, suh, fer certain, ef I'd heard bad news or not. I wanted ter let 'er know, but I was afeared ter tell 'er, en come away. I loves my wife, marster—I—I loves her mo' now dat Pete's gone dan ever befo'. I loves 'er mo' since she been had ter suffer dis way, en, marster, dis gwine ter kill 'er. It gwine ter kill Lindy, Marse William."

"What's the matter, father?" It was Helen

Warren's voice, and with a look of growing terror on her face she stood peering through the open doorway. The Major ejaculated a hurried and broken explanation, and with little, intermittent gasps of horror the young lady advanced to the old negro.

"Does Mam' Linda know?" she asked, her face ghastly and set in sculptural rigidity.

"Not yet, missy, not yet—it gwine ter kill yo' ol' mammy, child."

"Yes, it may," Helen said, an odd, alien quality of resignation in her voice. "I suppose I'd better go and break it to her. Father, Pete was innocent, absolutely innocent. Carson Dwight assured me of it. He was innocent, and yet—oh!"

With a shudder she turned back to her room across the hall. In the stillness the sound of the match she struck to light her lamp was raspingly audible. Without another word, and wringing the extended hand of his wordless master, Lewis crept down the stairs and out into the pale light of early morning. Like an old tree fiercely beaten by a storm, he leaned towards the earth. He looked about him absently for a moment, and then sat down on the edge of the veranda floor and lowered his head to his brown, sinewy hands.

A negro woman with a milk-pail on her arm came up the walk from the gate and started round the house to the kitchen door, but seeing him she stopped and leaned over him. "Is what Jake done say de trufe?" she asked.

"Yassum, yassum, it done over, Mary Lou—done over," Lewis said, looking up at her from his blear-

ing eyes; "but ef you see Lindy don't let on ter her yit. Young miss gwine ter tell 'er fust."

"Oh, my Lawd, it done over, den!" the woman said, shudderingly; "it gwine ter go hard with Mam' Lindy, Unc' Lewis."

"It gwine ter *kill* 'er, Mary Lou; she won't live dis week out. I know 'er. She had enough dis life wid all she been thoo fur 'erself en her white folks, in bondage en out, en' dis gwine ter settle 'er. I don't blame 'er. I'm done thoo myse'f. Ef de Lawd had spar' my child, I wouldn't er ax mo', but, Mary Lou, I hope I ain't gwine ter stay long. I'll hear dat po' boy beggin' fer mercy every minute while I live, en what I want mo' of it fur? Shucks! no, I'm raidy—en, 'fo' God, I wish dey had er tuck us all three at once. Dat ud 'a' been some comfort, but fer Pete ter be by hisse'f beggin' um ter spar' 'im—all by hisse'f, en me'n his mammy—"

The old man's head went down and his body shook with sobs. The woman looked at him a moment, and then, wiping her eyes on her apron, she went on her way.

A few minutes later, just as the red sun was rising in a clear sky and turning the night's moisture into dazzling gems on the grass and leaves of trees and shrubbery, like the beneficent smile of God upon a pleasing world, Helen descended the stairs. She had the sweet, pale face of a suffering nun as she paused, looked down on the old servant, and caught his piteous and yet grateful, upturned glance.

"I'm going to her now, Uncle Lewis," she said. "I want to be the first to tell her."

"Yes, you mus' be de one," Lewis sighed, as he rose stiffly; "you de onliest one."

He shambled along in her wake, his old hat, out of respect for her presence, grasped in his tense hand. As they drew near the little sagging gate at the cottage there was a sound of moving feet within, and Linda stood in the doorway shading her eyes from the rays of the sun with her fat hand. To the end of her life Helen had the memory of the old woman's face stamped on her brain. It was a yellow mask, which might have belonged to a dead as well as a living creature, behind which the lights of hope and shadows of despair were vying with each other for supremacy. In no thing pertaining to the situation did the pathos so piteously lie as in the fact that Linda was deliberately playing a part — fiercely acting a rôle that would fit itself to that for which the agony of her soul was pleading. She was trying to smile away the shadows her inward fears, her racial intuition were casting on her face.

"Mighty early fer you ter come, honey," she said; "but I reckon you is worried 'bout yo' ol' mammy."

"Yes, it's early for me to be up," Helen said, avoiding the wavering glance that seemed in reality to be avoiding the revelation of hers. "But I saw Uncle Lewis and thought I'd come back with him."

"You hain't had yo' breakfast yit, honey, I know," said Linda, reaching for a chair half-heartedly and placing it for her young mistress, and then her eyes fell on her husband's bareheaded, bowed attitude as he stood at the gate, and something in it, through her sense of sight, gave her a deadening blow. For an instant she almost reeled; she drew

a deep breath, a breath that swelled out her great, motherly bosom, then with her hands hanging limply at her side, she stood in front of Helen. For a moment she did not speak, and then, with her face on fire, her great, somnolent eyes ablaze, she suddenly bent down and put her hands on Helen's knees and said:

"Looky here, honey, I've been afraid of it all night long, an' I've fit it off an' fit it off, an' I got up dis mawnin' fightin' it off, but ef you come here so early 'ca'se—ef you come here ter tell me dat my child—ef you come here—ef you come here—gre't God on high, it ain't so! it cayn't be dat way! Look me in de eyes, honey, I'm raidy en waitin' fer you ter give it de lie."

For one moment she glared at Helen as the girl sat white and quivering, her glance on the floor, and then she uttered a piercing scream like that of a frightened beast, and grasping the hand of her husband, who was now by her side, she pointed a finger of stone at Helen. "Look! Look, Lewis; my Gawd, she *ain't lookin' at me!* Look at me, honey chile; *look* at me! D' you hear me say—" She stood firmly for an instant and then she reeled into her husband's arms.

"She daid; whut I tol you? Missy, yo' ol' mammy daid," and lifting his wife in his arms he bore her to the bed in the corner of the room. "Yes, she done daid," he groaned, as he straightened up.

"No, she's only fainted," said Helen; "bring me the camphor, quick!"

XXVIII

THAT morning at the usual hour the store-keepers opened their dingy houses in the main street and placed along the narrow brick sidewalks the dusty, stock-worn samples of their wares. The clerks and porters as they swept the floors would pause to discuss the happening of the night just gone. Old Uncle Lewis and Mammy Linda Warren's boy had been summarily dealt with, that was all. The longer word just used had of late years become a part of the narrowest vocabulary, suggesting to crude minds many meanings not thought of by lexicographers, not the least of which was something pertaining to justice far-reaching, grim, and unfailing in these days of bribery and graft. Only a few of the more analytical and philosophical ventured to ask themselves if, after all, the boy might have been innocent. If they put the question to the average citizen it was tossed off with a shrug and a "Well, what's the difference? It's such talk as he was guilty of that is at the bottom of all the black crimes throughout the South." Such venom as Pete's was the very muscle of the black claws that were everywhere reaching out for helpless white throats. Dead? Yes, he was dead. What of it? How else was the black, constantly increasing torrent to be dammed?

And yet by ten o'clock that morning even these tongues were silenced, for news strange and startling began to steal in from the mountains. The party who had been in pursuit of the desperado Sam Dudlow had overtaken him—found him hiding in a barn, covered with hay. He was unarmed and made no resistance, laughing as if the whole thing were a joke. He frankly told them that he would have given himself up earlier, but he had hoped to live long enough to get even with the other leader of the mob that had whipped him at Darley, a certain Dan Willis. He confessed in detail exactly how he had murdered the Johnsons and that he had done it alone. Pete Warren was in no way implicated in it. The lynchers, to get the whole truth, threatened him; they tortured him; they tied him to a tree and piled pine fagots about him, but he still stuck to his statement, and when they had mercifully riddled him with bullets, just as his clothing was igniting, they left him hanging by the road-side, a grewsome scarecrow as a warning to his kind, and, led by Jabe Parsons, they made all haste to reach the faction on Pete Warren's track to tell them that the boy was innocent.

Jabe Parsons, carrying a load on his mind, remembering his wife's valiant stand in behalf of the younger accused, rode faster than his tired fellows, and near his own farm met the lynchers returning from Darley. "Too late," they told him, in response to his news, the Hillbend boys had done away with the Darley jailbird and mysteriously hidden the body to inspire fear among the negroes.

At Darley consternation swept the place as story

after story of Aunt Linda's prostration passed from house to house. "Poor, faithful old woman! Poor old Uncle Lewis!" was heard on every side.

About half-past ten o'clock Helen, accompanied by Sanders, came down-town. At the door of Carson's office they parted and Helen came in. Carson happened to be alone. He rose suddenly from his seat and came towards her, shocked by the sight of her wan face and dejected mien.

"Why, Helen!" he cried, "surely you don't think—" and then he checked himself as he hastened to get a chair for her.

"I've just left mammy," she began, in a voice that was husky with emotion. "Oh, Carson, you can't imagine it! It is simply heart-rending, awful! She is lying there at death's door staring up at the ceiling, simply benumbed."

Carson sat down at his desk and leaned his head on his hand. Could he keep back the truth under such pressure? It was at this juncture that Garner came in. Casting a hurried glance at the two, and seeing Helen's grief-stricken attitude, he simply bowed.

"Excuse me, Miss Helen, just a moment," he said. "Carson, I left a paper in your pigeon-hole," and as he bent and extracted a blank envelope from the desk he whispered, warningly: "Remember, not one word of this! Don't forget the agreement! Not a soul is to know!" And putting the envelope into his pocket he went out of the room, casting back from the threshold a warning, almost threatening glance.

"I've been with her since sunup," Helen went on.

"She fainted at first, and when she came to—oh, Carson, you love her as I do, and it would have broken your heart to have heard her! Oh, such pitiful wailing and begging God to put her out of pain!"

"Awful, awful!" Dwight said; "but, Helen—" Again he checked himself. Before his mind's eye rose the faces of the faithful group who had stood by him the night before. He had pledged himself to them to keep the thing secret, and no matter what his own faith in Helen's discretion was he had no right, even under stress of her grief, to betray what had occurred. No, he couldn't enlighten her—not just then, at all events.

"I was there when Uncle Lewis came in to tell her that proof had come of Pete's absolute innocence," Helen went on, "but instead of comforting her it seemed to drive her the more frantic. She—but I simply can't describe it, and I won't try. You will be glad to know, Carson, that the only thing in the shape of comfort she has had was your brave efforts in her behalf. Over and over she called your name. Carson, she used to pray to God; she never mentions Him now. You, and you alone, represent all that is good and self-sacrificing to her. She sent me to you. That's why I am here."

"She sent you?" Carson was avoiding her eyes, fearful that she might read in his own a hint of the burning thing he was trying to withhold.

"Yes, you see the report has reached her about what the lynchers said in regard to hiding Pete's body. You know how superstitious the negroes are, and she is simply crazy to recover the—the

remains. She wants to bury her boy, Carson, and she refuses to believe that some one can't find him and bring him home. She seems to think you can."

"She wants me to—" He went no further.

"If it is possible, Carson. The whole thing is so awful that it has driven me nearly wild. You will know, perhaps, if anything can be done, but, of course, if it is wholly out of the question—"

"Helen"—in his desperation he had formulated a plan—"there is something that you ought to know. You have every right to know it, and yet I'm bound in honor not to let it out to any one. Last night," he went on, modestly, "in the hope of formulating some plan to avert the coming trouble, I asked Keith to get a number of my best friends together. We met at Blackburn's store. No positive, sworn vows were made. It was only the sacred understanding between men that the matter was to be held inviolate, owing to the personal interests of every man who had committed himself. You see, they came at my suggestion, as friends of mine true and loyal, and it seems to me that I'd have a moral right, even now, to take another into the body—another whom I trust as thoroughly and wholly as any one of them. Do you understand, Helen?"

"No, I'm in the dark, Carson," she said, with a feeble smile.

"You see, I want to speak freely to you," he continued. "I want to tell you some things you ought to know, and yet I am not free to do so unless—unless you will tacitly join us. Helen, do you understand? Are you willing to become one of us so far as absolute secrecy is concerned?"

"I am willing to do anything you'd advise, Carson," the girl replied, groping for his possible meaning through the cloud of mystery his queer words had thrown around him. "If something took place that I ought to know, and you are willing to confide it to me, I assure you I can be trusted. I'd die rather than betray it."

"Then, as one of us, I'll tell you," Carson said, impressively. "Helen, Pete, is not dead."

"Not dead?" She stared at him incredulously from her great, beautiful eyes. Slowly her white hand went out till it rested on his, and remained there, quivering.

"No, he's alive and so far in safe keeping, free from harm at present, anyway."

Her fingers tightened on his hand, her sweet, appealing face drew nearer to his; she took a deep breath. "Oh, Carson, don't say that unless you are *quite* sure."

"I am absolutely sure," he said; and then, as they sat, her hand still lingering unconsciously on his, he explained it all, leaving the part he had taken out of the recital as much as possible, and giving the chief credit to his supporters. She sat spellbound, her sympathetic soul melting and flowing into the warm current of his own while he talked as it seemed to her no human being had ever talked before.

When he had concluded she drew away her hand and sat erect, her bosom heaving, her eyes glistening.

"Oh, Carson," she cried; "I never was so happy in my life! It actually pains me." She pressed her hand to her breast. "Mammy will be so—but you say she must not—must not yet—"

"That's the trouble," Dwight said, regretfully. "I'm sure I could put her and Lewis on their guard so that they would act with discretion, but Blackburn and Garner—in fact, all the rest—are afraid to risk them, just now anyway. You see, they think Linda and Lewis might betray it in their emotions—their very happiness—and so undo everything we have accomplished."

"Surely, now that the report of Sam Dudlow's confession has gone out, they would let Pete alone," Helen said.

"I wouldn't like to risk it quite yet," said Dwight. "Right now, while they are under the impression that an innocent negro has been lynched, they seem inclined to quiet down, but once let the news go out that a few town men, through trickery, had freed the prisoner, and they would rise more furious than ever. No, we must be careful. And, Helen, you must remember your promise. Don't let even your sympathy for Linda draw it out of you."

"I can keep it, and I really shall," Helen said. "But you must release me as soon as you possibly can."

"I'll do that," he promised, as she rose to go.

"I'll keep it," she repeated, when she had reached the door; "but to do so I'll have to stay away from mammy. The sight of her agony would wring it from me."

"Then don't go near her till I see you," Dwight cautioned her. "I'll meet all the others to-day and put the matter before them. Perhaps they may give in on that point."

XXIX

AT the corner of the street Helen encountered Sanders, who was waiting for her. At the sight of him standing on the edge of the sidewalk, impatiently tapping the toe of his neatly shod foot with the ferrule of his tightly rolled silk umbrella, she experienced a shock which would have eluded analysis. He had been so completely out of her thoughts, and her present mood was of such an entrancing nature that she felt a desire to indulge it undisturbed. The bare thought of the platitudes she would have to exchange with any one ignorant of her dazzling discovery was unpleasant. After all, what was it about Sanders that vaguely incited her growing disapproval? This morning could it possibly be his very faultlessness of attire, his spick-and-span air of ownership in her body and soul because of their undefined understanding as to his suit, or was it because—because he had, although through no fault of his own, taken no part in the thing which today, for Helen, somehow, held more weight than all other earthly happenings? Indeed, fate was not using the Darley visitor kindly. He was unwittingly like a healthy soldier on a furlough making himself useful in the drawing-room while news of victory was pouring in from his comrades at the front.

"You see I waited for you," he said, gracefully raising his hat; "but, Helen, what has happened? Why, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," she said; "nothing at all."

"But," he went on, frowning in perplexity as he suited his step to hers, "I never saw any one in my life change so suddenly. Why, when you went into that office you were simply a picture of despair, but now you look as if you were bursting with happiness. Your face is flushed, your eyes are fairly dancing. Helen, if I thought—"

He paused, his own color rising, a deeper frown darkening his brow.

"If you thought what?" she asked, with a little irritation.

"Oh"—he knocked a stone out of his way with his umbrella—"what's the use denying it! I'm simply jealous. I'm only a natural human being, and I suppose I'm jealous."

"You have no cause to be," she said, and then she bit her lip with vexation at the slip of the tongue. Why should she defend herself to him? She had never said she loved him. She had not yet consented to marry him. Besides, she was in no mood to gratify his vanity. She wanted simply to be alone with the boundless delight she was allowed to share with no one but—Carson—Carson!—the one who had, for *her sake*, made the sharing of it possible.

"Well, I am uneasy, and I can't help it," Sanders went on, gloomily. "How can I help it? You left me so sad and depressed that you had hardly a word for me, and after seeing this Mr. Dwight you come out looking—do you know," he broke off, "that

you were there alone with that fellow nearly an hour?"

"Oh no, it couldn't have been so long," she said, further irritated by his open defence of what he erroneously considered his rights.

"But it was, for I timed you," Sanders affirmed. "Heaven knows I counted the actual minutes. There is a lot about this whole thing I don't like, but I hardly know what it is."

"You are not only jealous but suspicious," Helen said, sharply. "Those are things I don't like in any man."

"I've offended you, but I didn't mean to," Sanders said, with a sudden turn towards precaution. "You'll forgive me, won't you, Helen?"

"Oh yes, it's all right." She had suddenly softened. "Really, I am sorry you feel hurt. Don't think any more about it. I have a reason which I can't explain for feeling rather cheerful just now." They had reached the next street corner and she paused. "I want to go by Cousin Ida's. She lives down this way."

"And you'd rather I didn't go along?"

"I have something particular to say to her."

"Oh, I see. Then may I come as usual this afternoon?"

Her wavering, half-repentant glance fell. "Not this afternoon," she said. "I ought to be with mammy. Couldn't you call this evening?"

"It will seem a long time to wait in this dreary place, with nothing to occupy me," he said; "but I shall be well repaid. So I may come this evening?"

"Oh yes, I shall expect you then," and Helen turned and left him.

In the front garden of the Tarpley house she found her cousin watering the flowers. Observing Helen at the gate, Miss Tarpley hastily put down the tin sprinkling-pot and hurried to her.

"I was just going up to see mammy," Ida said. "I know I can be of no use and yet I wanted to try. Oh, the poor thing must be suffering terribly! She had enough to bear as it was, but that last night—oh!"

"Yes—yes," Helen said. "It is hard on her."

Ida Tarpley rested her two hands on the tops of the white palings of the fence and stared inquiringly into Helen's face.

"Why do you say it in that tone?" she asked; "and with that queer, almost smiling look in your eyes? Why, I expected to see you prostrated, and—well, I don't think—I actually don't think I ever saw you looking better in my life. What's happened, Helen?"

"Oh, nothing." Helen was now making a strong effort to disguise her feelings, and she succeeded to some extent, for Miss Tarpley's thoughts took another trend.

"And poor, dear Carson," she said, sympathetically. "The news must have nearly killed him. He came by here last night making all haste to get down-town, as he said, to see if something couldn't be done. He was terribly wrought up, and I never saw such a look of determination on a human face. 'Something *has* to be done,' he said; 'something *must* be done! The boy is innocent and shall not die like

a dog. It would kill his mother, and she is a good, faithful old woman. No, he shall not die!' And with those words he hurried on. Oh, Helen, that is sad, too. It is sad to see as noble a young spirit as he has fail in such a laudable undertaking. Think of how he stood up before that surging mob and let them shoot at him while he shouted defiance in their teeth, till they cowered down and slunk away! Think of a triumph like that, and then, after all, to meet with such galling defeat as overtook him last night! When I heard of the lynching I actually cried. I think I felt for him as much as I did for Mam' Linda. Poor, dear boy! You know why he wanted to do it so much—you know that as well as I do."

"Why he wanted to do it!" Helen echoed, almost hungry for the sweet confirmation of Dwight's fidelity to her cause.

"Yes, you know—you know that his whole young soul was set on it because it was your wish, because you were so troubled over it. I've seen that in his eyes ever since the matter came up. I saw it there last night, and it seemed to me that his very heart was burning up within him. Oh, I get mad at you—to think you'd let that Augusta man, even if you do intend some day to marry him—that you'd let him be here at such a time, as if Carson hadn't enough to bear without that. Ah, Helen, no other human being will ever love you as Carson Dwight does—never, never while the sun shines."

With a misleading smile of denial on her face Helen turned homeward. He loved her — Carson Dwight—*that man* of all men—still loved her. Her

body felt imponderable as she strode blithely on her way. In her hands she carried a human life—the life of the poor boy Carson had so wonderfully struggled for and intrusted to her keeping. To his mother and father Pete was dead, but to her and Carson, her first sweetheart, he still lived. The secret was theirs to hold between their throbbing hearts. Old Linda's grief was but a dream. Helen and Carson could draw aside the black curtain and tell her to look and see the truth.

Standing with bowed head at the front gate when she arrived home, she saw old Uncle Lewis, his bald pate bared to the sunshine.

"Mam' Lindy axin' 'bout you, missy," he said, pitifully. "She say you went down-town ter see Marse Carson, en she seem mighty nigh crazy ter know ef you found whar de—de body er de po' boy is at. Dat all she's beggin' en pleadin' fer now, missy, en ef dem white mens refuse it, de Lawd only know what she gwine ter do."

Helen gazed at him helplessly. Her whole young being was wrung with the desire to let him know the truth, and yet how could she tell him what had been revealed to her in such strict confidence?

"I'll go see mammy now," she said. "I've no news yet, Uncle Lewis—no news that I can give you. I'm looking for Carson to come up soon."

As she neared the cottage the motley group of negroes, serious-faced men and women, bland-eyed persons in their teens, and half-clad children, around the door intuitively and respectfully drew aside and she entered the cottage unaccompanied and unannounced. Linda was not in the sitting-room,

where she expected to find her, and so, wonderingly, Helen turned into the kitchen adjoining. Here the general aspect of things added to her growing surprise, for the old woman had drawn close the curtains of the little, small-paned windows, and before a small fire in the chimney she sat prone on the ash-covered hearth. That alone might not have been so surprising, but Linda had covered her body with several old tow sacks upon which she had plentifully sprinkled ashes. The grayish powder was in her short hair, on her face and bare arms, and filled her lap. There was one thing in the world that the old woman prized above all else—a big, leather-bound family Bible which she had owned since she first learned to read under the instruction of Helen's mother, and this, also ash-covered, lay open by her side.

"Is I gwine ter bury my chile?" she demanded, as she glared up at her mistress. "What young marster say? Is I, or is I never ter lay eyes on 'im ergin? Is I de only nigger mother dat ever lived on dis yeth, bound er free, dat cayn't have dat much? Tell me. Ef dey gwine ter le' me see 'im Marse Carson ud know it. What he say?"

Rendered fairly speechless by the predicament she was in, Helen could only stand staring helplessly. Presently, however, she bent, and lifting the Bible from the floor she laid it on the table. With her massive elbows on her knees; her fat hands over her face and almost touching the flames, Linda rocked back and forth.

"Dey ain't no God!" she cried; "ef dey is one He's es black es de back er dat chimbley. Dat book is er

lie. Dey ain't no love en mercy anywhars dis side de blinkin', grinnin' stars. Don't tell me er nigger's prayers is answered. Didn't I pray las' night till my tongue was swelled in my mouf fer um ter spare my boy? En what in de name er all created was de answer? When de day broke wid de same sun shinin' dat was shinin' when he laid de fus time on my breas', de news was fetch me dat my baby chile was dragged out wid er rope rounst his neck, prayin' ter men whilst I was prayin' ter God. Look lak dat enough, hein? But no, nex' come de news dat ef he'd er lived one short hour longer dey might er let 'im go 'ca'se dey foun' de right one. Look lak dat enough, too, hein? But nex' come de word, en de las' message: innocent or no, right one or wrong one, my chile wasn't goin' ter have a common buryin'-place—not even in de Potter's Fiel' dis book tell erbout so big. Don't talk ter me! Ef prayers fum niggers is answered mine was heard in hell, en old Scratch en all his imps er darkness was managin' it. Don't come near me! I might lay han's on you. I ain't myself. I heard er low trash white man say once dat niggers was des baboons. I may be one, en er wild one fer all I know—oh, honey, don't pay no 'tention ter me. Yo' ol' mammy is bein' burnt at de stake en she ain't 'sponsible. She love you, honey —she love you even in 'er gre't trouble."

"I understand, mammy," and Helen put her arms around the old woman's neck. An almost overpowering impulse had risen in her to tell the old sufferer the truth, but thinking that some of the negroes might be listening, and remembering her promise, she restrained herself.

"I'm going to write a note to Carson to come up at once," she said. "He'll have something to tell you, mammy."

And passing the negroes about the door she went to the house, and hastening into the library she wrote and forwarded by a servant the following note:

"DEAR CARSON,—Come at once, and come prepared to tell her. I can't stand it any longer. Do, do come.

"HELEN."

XXX

HALF an hour later Helen, waiting at the front gate, saw a horse and buggy turn the corner down the street. She recognized it as belonging to Keith Gordon. Indeed, Keith was driving, and with him was Carson Dwight.

Helen's heart bounded, a vast weight of incalculable responsibility seemed to lift itself from her. She unlatched the gate and swung it open.

"Oh, I thought you'd never come!" she smiled, as he sprang out and advanced to her. "I would have broken my oath of allegiance to the clan if you had waited a moment longer."

"I might have known you couldn't keep it," Dwight laughed. "Mam' Linda would have drawn it out of you just as you did out of me."

"But are you going to tell her?" Helen asked, just as Keith, who had stepped aside to fasten his horse, came up.

"Yes," Carson answered. "Keith and I made a lightning trip around and finally persuaded all the others. Invariably they would shake their heads, and then we'd simply tell them you wished it, and that settled it. They all seem flattered by the idea that you are a member."

"But say, Miss Helen," Keith put in, gravely,

"we really must guard against Lewis and Linda's giving it away. It is a most serious business, and, our own interests aside, the boy's life depends on it."

"Well, we must get them away from the cottage," said Helen. "They are now literally surrounded by curious negroes."

"Can't we have them up here in the parlor?" Carson asked. "Your father is down-town; we saw him as we came up."

"Yes, that's a good idea," Helen responded, eagerly. "The servants are all at the cottage; we'll make them stay there and have Uncle Lewis and Mam' Linda here."

"Suppose I run down and give the message," proposed Keith, and he was off with the speed of a ball-player on a home-run.

"Do you think there is any real danger to Mam' Linda's health in letting her know it suddenly?" Carson asked, thoughtfully.

"We must try to reveal it gradually," Helen said, after reflecting for a moment. "There's no telling. They say great joy often kills as quickly as great sorrow. Oh, Carson, isn't it glorious to be able to do this? Don't you feel happy in the consciousness that it was your great, sympathetic heart that inspired this miracle, your wonderful brain and energy and courage that actually put it through?"

"Not through yet," he laughed, depreciatingly, as his blood flowed hotly into his cheeks. "It would be just my luck right now to have this thing turn smack dab against us. We are not out of the woods yet, Helen, by long odds. The rage of that mob

is only sleeping, and I have enemies, political and otherwise, who would stir it to white heat at a moment's notice if they once got an inkling of the truth." He snapped his fingers. "I wouldn't give that for Pete's life if they discover our trick. Pole Baker had just come in town when Keith and I left. He said the Hillbend people were earnestly denying all knowledge of any lynching or of the whereabouts of Pete's body, and that some people were already asking queer questions. So, you see, if on top of that growing suspicion, old Lewis and Linda begin to dance a hoe-down of joy instead of weeping and wailing—well, you see, that's the way it stands."

"Oh, then, perhaps we'd better not tell them, after all," Helen said, crestfallen. "They are suffering awfully, but they would rather bear it for awhile than to be the cause of Pete's death."

"No," Carson smiled; "from the way you wrote, I know you have had about as much as you can stand, and we simply must try to make them comprehend the full gravity of the matter."

At this juncture Keith came up panting from his run and joined them. "Great Heavens!" he cried, lifting his hands, the palms outward. "I never saw such a sight. I can stand some things, but I'm not equal to torture of that kind."

"Are they coming?" Carson asked.

"Yes, there's Lewis now. Of course, I couldn't give them a hint of the truth down there in that swarm of negroes, and so my message that you wanted to see them here only seemed to key them up higher."

Carson turned to Lewis, who, hat in hand, his black

face set in stony rigidity, had paused near by and stood waiting respectfully to be spoken to.

"Uncle Lewis," he said, "we've got good news for you and Linda, but a great deal depends on its being kept secret. I must exact a sacred promise of you not to betray to a living soul by word of mouth or act what I am going to tell you. Will you promise, Lewis?"

The old man leaned totteringly forward till his gaunt fingers closed upon one of the palings of the fence; his eyes blinked in their deep cavities. He made an effort to speak, but his voice hung in his mouth. Then he coughed, cleared his throat, and slid one of his ill-shod feet backward, as he always did in bowing, and said, falteringly:

"God on high know, young marster, dat I'd keep my word wid you. Old Unc' Lewis would keep his word wid you ef dey was burnin' 'im at de stake. You been de bes' friend me'n Mam' Lindy ever had, young marster. You been de kind er friend dat *is* er friend. When you tried so hard t'other night ter save my boy fum dem men even when dey was shootin' at you en tryin' ter drag you down—oh, young marster, I wish you'd try me. I want ter show you how I feel down here in my heart. Dem folks is done had deir way; my boy is daid, but God know it makes it easier ter give 'im up ter have er young, high-minded white man lak you—"

"Stop, here's Mam' Linda," Carson said. "Don't tell her now, Lewis; wait till we are inside the house; but Pete is alive and safe."

The old man's eyes opened wide in an almost death-like stare, and he leaned heavily against the fence.

"Oh, young marster," he gasped, "you don't mean—you sholy can't mean—"

"Hush! not a word." Carson cautioned him with uplifted hand, and they all looked at old Linda as she came slowly across the grass. A shudder of horror passed over Dwight at the change in her. The distorted, swollen face was that of a dead person, only faintly vitalized by some mechanical force. The great, always mysterious depths of her eyes were glowing with bestial fires. For a moment she paused near them and stood glaring with incongruous defiance as if nothing in mortal shape could mean aught but ill towards her.

"Carson has something—something very important to tell you, dear mammy," Helen said, "but we must go inside."

"He ain't got nothin' ter tell me dat I don't know," Linda muttered, "lessen it is whar dey done put my chile's body. Ef you know dat, young marster —ef—"

But old Lewis had moved to her side, his face ablaze. He laid his hand forcibly on her shoulder. "Hush, 'oman!" he cried. "In de name er God, shet yo' mouf en listen ter young marster—listen ter 'im Linda, honey—hurry up—hurry up in de house!"

"Yes, bring her in here," Carson said, with a cautious glance around, and he and Helen and Keith moved along the walk while Linda suffered herself, more like an automaton than a human being, to be half dragged, half led up the steps and into the parlor. Keith, who had vaguely put her in the category of the physically ill, placed an easy-chair

for her, but from force of habit, while in the presence of her superiors, the old woman refused to sit. She and Lewis stood side by side while Carson carefully closed the door and came back.

"We've got some very, very good news for you, Mam' Linda," said he; "but you must not speak of it to a soul. Linda, the men who took Pete from jail did not kill him. He is still alive and safe, so far, from harm."

To the surprise of them all, Linda only stared blankly at the tremulous speaker. It was her husband who, full of fire and new-found happiness, now leaned over her. "Didn't you hear young marster?" he gulped; "didn't you hear 'im say we-all's boy was erlive?—*erlive*, honey?"

With an arm of iron Linda pushed him back and stood before Carson.

"You come tell me dat?" she cried, her great breast tumultuously heaving. "Young marster, 'fo' God I done had enough. Don't tell me dat now, en den come say it's er big mistake after you find out de trufe."

"Pete's all right, Linda," Carson said, reassuringly. "Keith and Helen will tell you about it."

With an appealing look in her eyes Linda extended a detaining hand towards him, but he had gone to the door and was cautiously looking out, his attention being drawn to the sound of footsteps in the hall. It was two negro maids just entering the house, having left half a dozen other negroes on the walk in front. Going out into the hall, Carson commanded the maids and the loiterers to go away, and the astonished blacks, with many a curious, back-

ward glance, made haste to do his bidding. A heavy frown was on his face and he shrugged his broad shoulders as he took his place on the veranda to guard the parlor door. "It's a ticklish business," he mused; "if we are not very careful these negroes will drop on to the truth in no time."

He had dismissed the idlers in the nick of time, for there was a sudden, joyous scream from Linda, a chorus of warning voices. The full import of the good news was only just breaking upon the stunned consciousness of the old sufferer. Screams and sobs, mingled with hysterical laughter, fell upon Carson's ears, through all of which rang the persistent drone of Keith Gordon's manly voice in gentle admonition. The door of the parlor opened and old Lewis came forth, his black face streaming with tears. Going to Carson he attempted to speak, but, unable to utter a word, he grasped the young man's hand, and pressing it to his lips he staggered away. A few minutes later Keith came out doggedly trying to divest his boyish features of a certain glorified expression that had settled on them.

"Good God!" he smiled grimly, as he fished a cigar from the pocket of his waistcoat, "I'm glad that's over. It struck her like a tornado. I'm glad I'm not in your shoes. She'll literally fall on your neck. Good Lord! I've heard people say negroes haven't any gratitude—Linda's burning up with it. You are her God, old man. She knows what you did, and she knows, too, that we opposed you to the last minute."

"You told her, of course," Carson said, reprovingly.

"I had to. She was trying to dump it all on me as the only member of the gang present. I told her, the whole thing was born in your brain and braced up by your backbone. Oh yes, I told her how we fought your plan and with what determination you stuck to it in the face of all opposition. No, the rest of us don't deserve any credit. We'd have squelched you if we could. Well, I simply wasn't cut out for heroic things. The easy road has always been mine to any destination, but I reckon nothing worth much was ever picked up by chance."

The two friends had gone down to the gate and Keith was unhitching his horse, when Helen came out on the veranda, and seeing Carson she hastened to him.

"She's up in my room," she explained. "I'm going to keep her there for the rest of the day anyway. I'm glad now that we took so much precaution. She admits that we were right about that. She says if she had known Pete was safe she might have failed to keep it from the others. But she is going to help us guard the secret now. But oh, Carson, she is already begging to be allowed to see Pete. It's pitiful. There are moments even now when she even seems to doubt his safety, and it is all I can do to convince her. She is begging to see you, too. Oh, Carson, when you told me about it why did you leave out the part you took? Keith told us all about your fight against such odds, and how you sat up all night at the store to keep the poor boy company."

"Keith was with me," Carson said, flushing, deeply. "Well, we've got Pete bottled up where

he is safe for the present, but there is no telling when suspicion may be directed to us."

"We are going to win; I feel it!" said Helen, fervidly. "Don't forget that I'm a member of the clan. I'm proud of the honor," and pressing his hand warmly she hurried back to the house.

XXXI

ON his way to Blackburn's store the next morning to inquire about the prisoner, Carson met Garner coming out of the barber-shop, where he had just been shaved.

"Any news?" Carson asked, in a guarded voice, though they were really out of earshot of any one.

"No actual *news*," Garner replied, stroking his thickly powdered chin; "but I don't like the lay of the land."

"What's up now?" Dwight asked.

"I don't know that there is anything wrong yet; but, my boy, discovery—discovery grim and threatening is in the very air about us."

"What makes you think so, Garner?" They paused on the street crossing leading over to Blackburn's store.

"Oh, it's all due to old Linda and Lewis," Garner said, in a tone of conviction. "You know I was dead against letting them know Pete was alive."

"You think we made a mistake in that, then?" Carson said. "Well, the pressure was simply too strong, and I had to give way under it. But why do you think it was a bad move?"

"From the way it's turning out," said Garner. "While Buck Black was shaving me just now he

remarked that his wife had seen Uncle Lewis and Linda and that she thought they were acting very peculiarly. I asked him in as off-hand and careless a manner as I could what he meant, and he said that his wife didn't think they acted exactly as if they had just lost their only child. Buck said it looked like they were only pretending to be broken-hearted. I thought the best way to discourage him was to be silent, and so I closed my eyes and he went on with his work. Presently, however, he said, bluntly, 'Look here, Colonel Garner'—Buck always calls me colonel—'where do you think they put that boy?' He had me there, you know, and I felt ashamed of myself. The idea of as good a lawyer as there is in this end of the State actually wiggling under the eye and tongue of a coon as black as the ace of spades! Finally I told him that, as well as I could gather, the Hillbend faction had put Pete out of the way, and were keeping it a secret to intimidate the negroes through their natural superstition. And what do you reckon Buck said. Huh, he'd make a good detective! He said he'd had his eye on the most rampant of the Hillbend men and that they didn't look like they'd lynched anything as big as a mouse. In fact, he thought they were on the lookout for a good opportunity in that line."

"It certainly looks shaky," Carson admitted, as they moved on to the store, where Blackburn stood waiting for them just inside the doorway.

"How did Pete pass the night?" Carson asked, his brow still clouded by the discouraging observations of his partner.

"Oh, all right," Blackburn made reply. "Bob

and Wade slept here on the counters. They say he snored like a saw-mill. They could hear him through the floor. Boys, I hate to dash cold water in your faces, but I never felt as shaky in my life."

"What's the matter with *you?*" Garner asked, with an uneasy laugh.

"I'm afraid a storm is rising in an unexpected quarter," said the store-keeper, furtively glancing up and down the street, and then leading them farther back into the store.

"Which quarter is that?" Carson asked, anxiously.

"The sheriff is acting odd—mighty odd," said Blackburn.

"Good Lord! you don't think Braider's really on our trail do you?" Garner cried, in genuine alarm.

"Well, you two can make out what it means yourselves," and Blackburn pulled at his short chin whiskers doggedly. "It was only about half an hour ago—Braider's drinking some, and was, perhaps, on that account a little more communicative—he came in here, his face as red as a pickled beet, and smelling like a bunghole in a whiskey-barrel, and leaned against the counter on the dry-goods side.

"'I'm the legally elected sheriff of this county, ain't I?' he said, in his maudlin way, and I told him he was by a big majority.

"'Well,' he said, after looking down at the floor for a minute, 'I'll bet you boys think I'm a dern slack wad of an officer.'

"I didn't know what the devil he was driving at, and so I simply kept my mouth shut, but you bet your life I had my ears open, for there was something in his eye that I didn't like, and then when he said

'*you boys*' in that tone I began to think he might be on to the work we did the other night."

"Well, what next?" Carson asked, sharply.

"Well, he just leaned on the counter, about to slide down every minute," Blackburn went on, "and then he began to laugh in a silly sort of way and said, 'Them *Hillbend* fellers are a slick article, ain't they?' Of course I didn't know what to say," said the store-keeper, "for he had his eyes on me and was grinning to beat the Dutch, and that is the kind of cross-examination I fail at. Finally, however, I managed to say that the Hillbend folks had beaten the others to the jail, anyway, and he broke out into another knowing laugh. 'The Hillbend gang didn't have as fur to go,' he said. 'Oh, they are a slick article, an' they've got a slick young leader.'"

"What else?" asked Carson, who looked very grave and stood with his lips pressed together.

"Nothing else," Blackburn answered. "Just then Wiggin, your boon companion and bosom friend, stopped at the door and called him."

"Good Lord, *and with Wiggin!*" Garner exclaimed. "Our cake is dough, and it's good and wet."

"Yes, he's a Wiggin man!" said Blackburn. "I've known he was pulling against Carson for some time. It seems like Braider sized up the situation, and decided if he was going to be re-elected himself he'd better pool issues with the strongest man, and he picked that skunk as the winner. I went to the door and watched them. They went off, arm in arm, towards the court-house."

"Braider is evidently on to us," Carson decided, grimly; "and the truth is, he holds us in the palm

of his hand. If he should insist on carrying out the law, and rearresting Pete and putting him back in jail, Dan Willis would see that he didn't stay there long, and Wiggin would swear out a warrant against us as the greatest law-breakers unhung."

"Oh yes, the whole thing certainly looks shaky," admitted Blackburn.

"I tell you one thing, Carson," Garner observed, grimly, "there are no two ways about it, we are going to lose our client and your election just as sure as we stand here."

"I don't intend to give up yet," Dwight said, his lip twitching nervously and a fierce look of determination dawning in his eyes. "We've accomplished too much so far to fail ignominiously. Boys, I'd give everything I have to ward this thing off from old Aunt Linda. She's certainly borne enough."

The two lawyers went to their office, avoiding the numerous groups of men about the stores who seemed occupied with the different phases of the ever-present topic. They seated themselves at their desks, and Garner was soon at work. But there was nothing for Carson to do, and he sat gloomily staring through the open doorway out into the sunshine. Presently he saw Braider across the street and called Garner's attention to him. Then to their surprise the sheriff turned suddenly and came directly towards them.

"Gee, here he comes!" Garner exclaimed; "he may want to pump us. Keep a sharp eye on him, Carson. He may really not know anything actually incriminating, after all. Watch him like a hawk!"

"'YOU ARE *TWO* MEN THAT I WANT TO TALK TO'"

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XXXII

THE young men pretended to be deeply absorbed over their work when the stalwart officer loomed up in the doorway, his broad-brimmed hat well back on his head, the flush of intoxicants in his tanned face, his step unsteady.

"I hope I won't disturb you, gentlemen," he said; "but you are *two* men that I want to talk to—I might say talk to as a brother."

"Come in, come in, Braider," Carson said; "take that chair."

As Braider moved with uncertain step to a chair, tilted it to one side to divest it of its burden of books, newspapers, and old briefs and other defunct legal documents, Garner with a wary look in his eye fished a solitary cigar from his pocket—the one he had reserved for a mid-day smoke—and profered it.

"Have a cigar," he said, "and make yourself comfortable."

The sheriff took the cigar as absent-mindedly as he would, in his condition, have received a large bank-note, and held it too tightly for its preservation in his big red hand.

"Yes, I want to talk to you boys, and I want to say a whole lot that I hope won't go any further.

I've always meant well by you two, and hoped fer your success both in the law—and politics."

Garner cast an amused glance, in spite of the gravity of the situation, at his partner, and then said, quite evenly, "We know that, Braider—we always *have* known it."

"Well, as I say, I want to *talk* to you. I've heard that an honest confession is good for the soul, if not for the pocket, and I'm here to make one, as honest as I kin spit it out."

"Oh, that's it?" said Garner, and with a wary look of curiosity on his face he sat waiting.

"Yes, and I want to begin back at the first and sort o' lead up. It's hard to keep a fellow's political leaning hid, Carson, and I reckon you may have heard that I had some notion of casting my luck in with Wiggin."

"After he began circulating those tales about me, yes," Carson said, with a touch of severity; "not before, Braider—at least not when I worked as I did the last time for your own election."

"You are plumb right," the sheriff said, readily enough. "I flopped over sudden, I'll acknowledge; but that's neither here nor there." He paused for a moment and the lawyers exchanged steady glances.

"He may want to make a bargain with us," Garner's eyes seemed to say, but Carson's mind had grasped other and more dire possibilities as he recalled Blackburn's remark of a few minutes before. In fact, all those assurances of good-will might mean naught else than that the sheriff—at the instigation of Wiggin and others—had come actually to arrest him as the leader of the men who had intimidated

the county jailer and stolen away the State's prisoner. The thought seemed to be borne telepathically to Garner, for that worthy all at once sat more rigidly, more aggressively defiant in his chair, and the pen he was chewing was suspended before his lips. This beating about the bush, in serious things, at least, was not Garner's method.

"Well, well, Braider," he said, with a change of tone and manner, "tell us right out what you want. The day is passing and we've got lots to do."

"All right, all right," agreed the intoxicated man; "here goes. Boys, what I'm going to say is a sort of per-personal matter. You've both treated me like a respectable citizen and officer of the law, and I've taken it just as if I fully deserved the honor. But Jeff Braider ain't no hypocrite, if he *is* a politician and hobnobs with that sort of riffraff. Boys, always, away down at the bottom of everything I ever did tackle in this life, has been the memory of my old mother's teachings, and I've tried my level best, as a man, to live up to 'em. I don't know as I ever come nigh committing crime—as I regard it — till here lately. Crime, they tell me, stalks about in a good many disguises. The crime I'm talking about had two faces to it. You could look at it one way and it would seem all right, and then from another side it would look powerful bad. Well, I first saw this thing the night the mob raided Neb Wynn's shanty and run Pete Warren out and chased him to your house, Carson. You may not want to look me in the eye ag'in, my boy, when I tell you, but I could have come to your aid a sight quicker that night than I did if I hadn't been loaded down

with so many fears of injury to myself. As I saw that big mob rushing like a mad river after that nigger, I said to myself, I did, that no human power or authority could save 'im anyway, and that if I stood up before the crowd and tried to quiet them, that—well, if I wasn't shot dead in my tracks I'd kill myself politically, and so I waited in the edge of the crowd, hiding like a sneak-thief, till—till you did the work, and then I stepped up as big as life and pretended that I'd just arrived."

"Oh!" Garner exclaimed, and he stared at the bowed head of the officer with a look of wonder in his eyes; and it was a look of hope, too, for surely no human being of exactly *this* stamp would take unfair advantage of any one.

"That was the *first* time," Braider gulped, as he went on, his glance now directed solely to Carson. "My boy, I went to bed that night, after we jailed that nigger, feeling meaner than an egg-sucking dog looks when he's caught in the act. If there is anything on earth that will shame a man it is to see another display more moral and physical courage than he does, and you did enough of both that night to show me where I stood. It was a new thing to me, and it made me mad. I was a good soldier in the war—I wear a Confederate veteran's badge that was pinned onto my coat in public by the beautiful daughter of a dead comrade—but being shot at in a bunch ain't the same as being the *only* target, and I showed my limit."

"Oh, you are exaggerating the whole thing," Carson said, with a flush of embarrassment.

"No I ain't, Carson Dwight," Braider said, feel-

ingly, and he took out his red cotton handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "You showed me that night the difference between bravery, so-called, and the genuine thing. I reckon bravery for personal gain is a weak imitation of bravery that acts just out of human pity as yours did that night. Well, that ain't all. The next day I was put to a worse test than ever. It was noised about, you know, that a bigger mob than the first was rising. I stayed out of the centre of town as much as I could, for everywhere I went folks would look at me as if they thought I'd surely do something to protect the prisoner, and at home my wife was whimpering around all day, saying she was sure Pete was innocent, or enough so to deserve a trial, if not for himself for the sake of his mammy and daddy. But what was such a wavering thing as I was to do? I took it that seventy-five per cent. of the men who had backed me with their ballot in my election was bent on lynching the prisoner, and if I opposed them they would consider me a traitor. On the other hand, I was up against this: if I did put up a feeble sort of opposition and gave in easy under pressure, the conservative men, like some we have here in town, would say I didn't mean business or I'd have actually opened fire on the mob. You see, boys, I wasn't man enough to take a stand either way, and though I well knew what was coming, I went about lying like a dog—lying in my throat, telling everybody that the indications showed that the excitement had quieted down. I went home that night and told my wife all was serene, and I drank about a quart of rye whiskey to keep me from thinking

about the business and went to bed, but my conscience, I reckon, was stronger than my whiskey, for I rolled and tumbled all night. It seemed to me that I was, with my own hands, tying the rope around that pore nigger's neck. There I lay, a sworn officer of the law, flat on my back with not enough moral courage in my miserable carcass to have killed a gnat. Carson, if I saw you once before my eyes that long night, I saw you five hundred times. Your speech rang over and over in my ears. I saw you stand there when a ball had already grazed your brow and defy them to shoot again. I saw that poor black boy clinging to your knees, and knew that the light of Heaven had shone on you, while I lay in the hot darkness of the bottomless pit."

"God, you do put it strong!" Garner exclaimed.

"I'm not putting it half strong enough," the sheriff went on. "I don't deserve to hold office even in a community half run by mob law. But I ain't through. I ain't through yet. I got up early that awful morning, and went out to feed my hogs at a pen that stands on a back street, and there a woman milking a cow told me that it was over. Pete Warren was done for—guilty or not, he was done for. I went in the house and tried to gulp down my breakfast, faced by my wife, who wouldn't speak to me, and showed in other ways what she thought about the whole thing. She was eternally sighing and going on about old Mammy Lindy and her feelings. I first went to the jail, and there I was told that two mobs had come, the first the Hillbend crowd, who did the work, and the bigger mob that got there too late."

Braider's voice had grown husky and he coughed. Garner stole a searching glance of inquiry at Carson, but Dwight, his face suffused with a warm look of pity for the speaker, was steadily staring through the open door.

"I ain't done yet, God knows I ain't," the sheriff gulped. "That morning I felt meaner than any convict that ever wore ball and chain. If I'd been tried and found guilty of stabbing a woman in the back I don't believe I could have felt less like a man. I tried to throw it all off by thinking that I couldn't have done any good anyway, but it wouldn't work. Carson, you and your plucky stand for the maintenance of law was before me, and you wasn't paid for the work while I was. Huh! do you remember seeing me as you came out of Blackburn's store that morning, with your hair all tousled up and your eyes looking red and bloodshot?"

"Yes, I remember seeing you," said Dwight. "I would have stopped to speak to you but—but I was in a hurry to get home."

"Well, you may have heard that I used to be a sort of a one-horse detective," Braider went on, "and I had acquired a habit of looking for the explanation of nearly every unusual thing I saw, and —well, you coming out of that store before it was opened for trade, while the shutters in the front was still closed, struck me as odd. Then again, remembering your big interest in Pete's case, somehow, it didn't seem to me—meeting you sudden that way—that you looked quite as downhearted as I expected. In fact, I thought you appeared sort o' satisfied over something."

"Oh!" Garner exclaimed, all at once suspecting Braider of a gigantic ruse to entrap them. "You thought he looked chipper, did you? Well, I must say he looked exactly the other way to me when I first saw him that day."

"Well, it started me to wondering, anyway," went on the sheriff, ignoring Garner's interruption, "and I set to work to watch. I hung about the restaurant across the street, smoking a cigar and keeping my eyes on that store. After awhile I saw Bob Smith go in the store and then Wade Tingle. Then I saw a big tray of grub covered with a white cloth sent from the Johnston House, and Bob Smith come to the door and took it in, sending the coon that fetched it back to the hotel. Well, I waited a minute or two and then sauntered, careless-like, across and went in. I chatted awhile with Bob and Wade, noticing, I remember, that for a newspaper man Wade seemed powerful indifferent about gathering items about what had happened, and that Blackburn was busy folding up a tangled lot of short pieces of white sheeting. All this time I was looking about to see where that waiter full of grub had gone. Not a sign of it was in sight, but in a lull in the talk I heard the clink of crockery somewhere below me, and I caught on. Boys, I'm here to tell you that never did a condemned soul feel as I felt. I went out in the open air praying, actually praying, that what I suspected might be true. I started for the jail and on the way met Burt Barrett. I asked him for particulars, and when he said that the Hillbend mob had left word that nobody need even look for the remains of the boy my heart gave a big jump in the

same way as it had when that cup and saucer collided in that cellar. I asked Burt if he noticed which way the mob tuck the prisoner, and he said down towards town. I asked him if it wasn't odd for Hillbend folks to go that way to hang a man, and he agreed that it was. Well, to make a long story short, I was on to your gigantic ruse, and God above knows what a load it took off of me. You had saved me, Carson —you had saved me from toting that crime to my grave. I knew you were the ringleader, for I didn't know anybody else who would have thought of such a plan. You are a sight younger man than I am, but you stuck to principle, while I shirked principle, duty, and everything else. Doing all that was hurting your political chances, and you knew it, but you stuck to what was right all the same."

"Yes, he certainly has queered his political chances," Garner said, grimly, with a look of wonder in his eye over the sheriff's frank confession. "But you, I think you said, were a Wiggin man," he finished.

"Well, Wiggin and some others *think* I am yet," said Braider; "and I reckon I was till this thing come up; but, boys, I guess I've got a little smidgin of good left in me, for somehow Wiggin has turned my stomach. But I hain't got to what I was leading up to. Neither one of you hain't admitted that there is a nigger in that wood-pile yet, and I don't blame you for keeping it to yourselves. That is your business, but the time has come when Jeff Braider's got to do the right thing or plunge deeper into hellishness, and he's had a taste of what it means and don't want no more of it. I may lose all I've got by

it. Wiggin and his gang may beat me to a cold finish next election, but from now on I'm on the other side."

"Good," said Garner; "that's the way to talk. Was that what you were leading up to, Braider?"

"Not altogether," and the sheriff rose and stood over Carson, resting his hand on the young man's shoulder to steady himself. "My boy, I've come to tell you that the damnedest, blackest plot agin you that ever was laid has been hatched out."

"What is that, Braider?" Carson asked, calmly enough under the circumstances.

"Wiggin and his gang have found out that a trick was played night before last. The Hillbend men convinced them that they didn't lynch anybody, and the Wiggin crowd smelt around until they dropped on to the thing. The only fact they are short on is where the boy is hid. They think he is in the house of one of the negro preachers. Wiggin come to me, not half an hour ago, and considering me one of his stand-bys, he told me all about it. The scheme is for me to arrest Pete and jail 'im on the charge of murder and then to arrest you fer being the ring-leader of a jail-breaking gang, who preaches law and order in public for political gain and breaks both in secret."

"And what do they think will become of Pete?" Carson asked, a touch of supreme bitterness in his tone.

"Wiggin didn't say; but I know what would happen to him. The seeds of bloody riot are being strewn broadcast by the handful. They've been to every member of the crowd that lynched Sam Dudlow

and warned them, on their lives, not to repeat the statement that Dudlow had said Pete was innocent. They told the lynchers that you two lawyers were on the hunt for men who had heard the confession and intend to use that as evidence against them."

"Ah, that *is* slick, slick!" Garner muttered.

"Slick as double-distilled goose-grease," said Braider. "The lynchers are denying to friend or foe that Dudlow said a word, and the news is spreading like wildfire that Pete was Dudlow's accomplice, and that you, Carson, are trying, with a gang of town dudes, to carry your point by main, bull-headed force."

"I see, I see." Carson had risen and with a deep frown on his face stood leaning against the top of his desk. He extended his hand to the officer and said, "I appreciate your telling me all this, Braider, more than I can say."

"What's the good of my telling you if the news doesn't benefit you?" the sheriff asked. "Carson, I want to see you win. I ain't half a man myself, but I've got two little boys just starting to grow up, and I wish they could be like you—a two-legged bull-dog that clamps his teeth on what's right and won't let loose. Carson, you've got a chance—a bare chance—to get your man out alive."

"What's that?" Dwight asked, eagerly.

"Why, let me hold the mob in check by promising to arrest Pete, and you get some trusty feller to take him in a buggy to-night through the country to Chattanooga. It would be a ticklish trip, and you want a man that won't get scared at his shadow, for on every road out of Darley, men will be on the look-

out, but if you once got him there he would be absolutely safe, for no mob would go out of the State to do work of that sort. Getting a good man is the main thing."

"I'll do it myself," Dwight said, firmly.

"You?" Garner cried. "That's absurd!"

"I'm the only one who *could* do it," Carson declared, "for Pete would not go with any one else."

"I really believe you are right," Garner agreed, reluctantly; "but it is a nasty undertaking after all you've been through."

"By gum!" exclaimed Braider, extending his hand to Dwight. "I hope you will do it. I want to see you complete a darn good all-round job."

"Well, you *are* an officer of the law," Garner observed, with amusement written all over his rugged face, "asking a man to steal your own prisoner."

"What else can I do that's at all decent?" Braider asked. "Besides, do you fellows know that there never has been any written warrant for Pete's arrest. I started to jail him without any, and old Mrs. Parsons turned him loose. The only time he was put in jail was by Carson himself. By George! as I look at it, Carson, you have every right to take him out of jail, by any hook or crook, since you was responsible for him being there instead of hanging to a limb of a tree. I tell you, my boy, there ain't any law on earth that can touch you. Nobody is prepared to testify against Pete, and if you will get him to Chattanooga and keep him there for a while he can come back here a free man."

"I have friends there who will look after him," Dwight said. "I'll start with him to-night."

XXXIII

THAT afternoon Keith Gordon went to Warren's to tell Helen of Carson's plan for the removal of Pete. She received him in the big parlor, and he found her seated at one of the wide windows which, in summer-time, was used as a doorway to the veranda.

"I met the conquering hero, Mr. Sanders, on my way down," he said, lightly. "I presume he has been here as usual."

"He only called to say good-bye," Helen answered, a little coldly.

"Oh, that *is* news," Keith pursued, in the same tone. "Rather sudden, isn't it?"

"No, his affairs would not permit a longer visit," said Helen. "But you didn't come to talk of him; it was something about Pete."

She sat very still and rigid while he went into detail as to the whole situation, and when he had finished she rested her chin in her white hand, and he saw her breast rise and fall tremulously.

"There is danger attached to the trip," she said, without looking at him. "I know it, Keith, by the way you talk."

He deliberated for an instant, then acknowledged: "Yes, there is, and to my way of thinking, Helen,

there is a great deal. Wade and I tried to get him to consent to some other plan, but he wouldn't hear to it. He's so anxious to put it through all right that he won't trust to any substitute, and he won't let any one else go along, either. He thinks it would attract too much attention."

"In what particular way does the danger lie?" Helen faltered, and Keith saw her pass her hand over her mouth as if to reprimand her lips for their unsteadiness.

"I'd tell you there wasn't any at all, as Carson would have me do," Keith declared; "but when a fellow has the courage of an army of men, I believe in his getting the full credit for it. You want to know and I'm going to tell you. He's been through ticklish places enough in this business, but going over that lonely road to-night, when a thousand furious men may be on the lookout for him, is the worst thing he has tackled. It wouldn't be so very dangerous to a man who would throw up his hands if accosted, but, Helen, if you could have seen Carson's face when he was telling us about it, you would know that he will actually die rather than see Pete taken. He's reckless of late, anyway."

"Reckless!" Helen echoed, and this time she gave Keith a full, almost pleading stare.

"Oh yes, you know he's reckless. He's been so ever since Mr. Sanders came. It looks to me like—well, I reckon a man can understand another better than a woman can, but it looks to me like Carson is doing the whole thing because you feel so worried about it."

"You certainly wrong him there," Helen declared. "He is doing it simply because it is right."

"Oh, of course he thinks it's *right*," Keith returned, with a boyish smile; "he thinks everything *you* want is right."

When Keith had gone Helen went at once to Linda's cottage to tell her the news, putting it in as hopeful a light as possible, and not touching upon the danger of the journey. But the old woman had a very penetrating mind, and she stood in the doorway with a deeply furrowed brow for several minutes without saying anything, then her observation only added to Helen's burden of anxiety.

"Chile," she said, "ol' Lindy don't like de way dat looks one bit. You say young marster got ter steal off in de dead o' night, en dat he cayn't even let me see my boy once 'fo' he go. Suppin up, honey — suppin up! De danger ain't over yit. Honey, I know what it is," Linda groaned; "dem white folks is rising ergin."

"Well, even if that is the reason"—Helen felt the chill hand of fear grasp her heart at the admission—"even if that is it, Carson will get him away safely."

"Ef he *kin*, honey, ef he *kin!*" Linda moaned. "God been behind 'im all thoo so fur, but I seed de time when de Lawd Hisse'f seem ter turn His back on folks tryin' ter do dey level best."

Leaving Linda muttering and moaning in the cottage doorway, the girl went with a despondent step back to the big empty house and wandered aimlessly about the various rooms.

As night came on and her father returned from

town, she met him on the veranda and gave him a kiss of greeting, but she soon discovered that he had heard nothing. In fact, he was one of the many who still believed that Pete had been lynched, the vague whisperings to the contrary not having reached his old ears. She sat with him at the tea-table, and then went up to her room and lighted her lamp on her bureau. As she did so she looked at her reflection in the mirror and started at the sight of her grave features. Then a flash from her wrist caught her eye. It was the big diamond of a beautiful bracelet which Sanders had given her, and as she looked at it she shuddered. Was she superstitious? She hardly knew, and yet a strange idea took possession of her brain. Would her unspoken prayers for Carson Dwight's safety in his perilous expedition be answered while she wore that gift from another man, after she had spurned Carson's great and lasting love, and allowed the poor boy to think that she had given herself heart and soul to this stranger? She hesitated only a moment, and opening a jewel box she unclasped the bracelet and put it away. Then with a certain lightness of heart she went to the window overlooking the grounds of the Dwight homestead and stood there staring out in the hope of seeing Carson. But he was evidently not at home, for no lights were visible except a dim one in the invalid's room and one in old Dwight's chamber adjoining.

At ten o'clock Helen disrobed herself still with that awful sense of impending tragedy hovering over her. The oil in her lamp was almost out, and for this reason only she extinguished the flame, else

she would have kept it burning through the night to dissipate the material shadows which seemed to accentuate those of her spirit. She heard the old grandfather clock on the stair-landing below solemnly strike ten, then the monotonous tick-tack as the great pendulum swung to and fro. Sleep was out of the question. A few minutes before eleven she heard a soft foot-fall on the walk in the front garden, and going out on the veranda she looked down.

The bowed form of a woman was moving restlessly back and forth from the steps to the gate.

"Is that you, mammy?" Helen asked, softly.

The handkerchiefed head was lifted and Linda looked up.

"Yes, it's me, honey. I can't sleep. What de use? Kin er mother sleep when her chile is comin' in de worl'? No, you know she can't; neither kin she close 'er eyes when she's afeared dat same chile is gwine out of it. I'm afeared, honey. I'm afeared ter-night wuss dan all. Seem lak de evil sperits des been playin' wid us all erlong—makin' us think we gwine ter come thoo, so 't will hit us harder w'en it do strack de blow. You go on back ter yo' baid, honey. You catch yo' death er cold. I'm gwine home right now."

Helen saw the old woman disappear round the corner of the house, but she remained on the veranda. The clock was striking eleven, and she was about to go in, when she heard the dull beat of hoofs on the carriage-drive of the Dwight place, and through the half moonlight she saw a pair of horses, Carson's best, harnessed to a buggy and driven by

their owner slowly and cautiously going towards the big gate. Dwight himself got down to open it. She heard his low commands to the spirited animals as he led them forward by the bit, and then he stepped back to close and latch the gate. She had an overpowering impulse to call out to him; but would it be wise? His evident precaution was to keep his mother from knowing of his departure, and Helen's voice might attract the attention of the invalid and seriously hamper him in his undertaking. With her hands pressed to her breast she saw him get into the buggy, heard his calm voice as he spoke to the horses, and then he was off—off to do his duty—and *hers*. She went back to her room and laid down, haunted by the weird thought that she would never see him again. Then, all at once, she had a flash of memory which sent the hot blood of shame from her heart to her brain, and she sat up, staring through the darkness. *That* was the man against whom she had steeled her heart for his conduct, his youthful indiscretions with her unfortunate brother. Was Carson Dwight to go forever unpardoned—unpardoned by such as *she* while *that* sort of soul held suffering sway within him?

The hours of the long night dragged by and another day began. Keith came up after breakfast and related the particulars of Carson's departure. Graphically he recounted how the gang had robed the ill-starred Pete in grotesque woman's attire and seen him and Carson safely in the buggy, but that was all that could be told or foretold. As for Keith, he and all the rest were trying to look on the bright side, and they would succeed better but for the long face

Pole Baker had drawn when he came into town early that morning and heard of the expedition.

"So he was uneasy?" Helen said, in perturbation.

Keith hesitated for a moment and then answered: "Yes, to tell you the truth, Helen, it almost staggered him. He is a good-natured, long-headed chap, and he lost his temper. He cursed us all out for a silly, stupid set for allowing Carson to take such a risk. Finally we drew out of him what he feared. He said the particular road Carson took to reach the State line was actually alive with men, who had been keyed up to the highest tension by Wiggin and his followers. Pole said they had their eye on that road particularly because it was the most direct way to Chattanooga, and that Carson wouldn't have one chance in five hundred of passing unmolested. He said the idea of fooling men of that stamp by putting Pete in a woman's dress in the company of Carson, of all human beings, was the work of insane men."

"It really was dangerous!" said Helen, pale to the lips.

"Well, we meant it for the best"—Keith defended himself and his friends — "we didn't know the road was a particularly dangerous one. In fact, Pole didn't learn it himself until several hours after Carson had left. I really believe he'd have helped us do what we did if he had been with us last night. We did the best we could; besides, Carson was going to have his way. Every protest we made was swept off with that winning laugh of his. In spite of the gravity of the thing, he kept us roaring. I have never seen him in better spirits. He was bowing and scraping before that veiled and hooded darky

as if he were the grandest lady in the land. He even insisted on handing Pete into the buggy and protecting his long skirt from the dusty wheel. We never realized what we had done till he was gone and we all gathered in the store and talked it over. Blackburn, I reckon, being the oldest, was the bluest. He almost cried. Helen, I've seen popular men in my life, but I never saw one with so many friends as Carson. He's an odd combination. His friends love him extravagantly and his enemies hate him to the limit."

Late that afternoon, unable to wait longer for news of Carson, Helen went down to his office. Garner was in, and she surprised a look of firmly grounded uneasiness on his strong face. For a moment it was as if he intended to make some equivocal reply to her inquiry, but threw aside the impulse as unworthy of her courage and intelligence.

"To be candid," he said, as he stood stroking his chin, which bristled with open disregard for appearances under stress of more important things—"to tell you the whole truth, Miss Helen, I don't like the lay of the land." Then he told her that the sheriff had just informed him of the whispered rumor that a body of men had met Carson Dwight and his charge near the State line about three o'clock in the morning. What had taken place the sheriff didn't know, beyond the fact that the men had disbanded and returned to their homes all gravely uncommunicative. What it meant no one but the participants knew. To face the facts, it looked very much as if harm had really come to one, if not to both, of the two. The mob had evidently

been wrought to a high pitch of resentment for the trick Carson had played in stealing the prisoner from jail, and this second attempt to get him away may have enraged his enemies to outright violence against him, especially as Dwight was a fighting man and very hot-headed when roused.

Unable to discuss the matter in her depressed frame of mind, Helen left him and went home. The whole story being now out, she found her father warmly excited and disposed to talk about it in all its phases, the earliest as well as the latest, but she had no heart for it, and after urging the Major not to speak of it to Linda she went supperless to her room.

Two hours passed. The dusk had given way to the deeper darkness of evening. The moon had not yet risen and the starlight from a partly clouded sky was not sufficiently luminous to aid the vision in reaching any considerable distance, and yet from one of the rear windows of her room, where she stood morosely contemplative, she could see the vague outlines of Linda's cottage. It was while she was looking at the doorway of the little domicile, which stood out above the shrubbery of the rear garden as if dimly lighted from a candle within, that she saw something which caused her heart to suddenly bound. It was the live coal of a cigar, and the smoker seemed to be leaving the cottage, passing through the little gateway, and entering her father's grounds. What more natural than for Carson, if he had returned safely, to go at once to the mother of the boy with the news? Helen almost held her breath. She would soon be reasonably sure, for if it were

Carson he would take a diagonal direction to reach the gateway to the Dwight homestead. Was it Carson, or—could it be her father? Her heart sank over the last surmise, and then it bounded again, for the coal of fire, fitfully flaring, was moving in the direction prayed for. Down the stairs Helen glided noiselessly, lest the Major hear her, and yet rapidly. When she reached the front veranda and descended the steps to the grass of the lawn she was just in time to see the red disk passing through the gateway to Dwight's. No form was visible, and yet she called out firmly and clearly:

"Carson! Carson!" The coal of fire paused, described a curve, and she bounded towards it.

"Did you call me?" Carson Dwight asked, in a voice so low from hoarseness that it hardly reached her ears.

"Yes, wait!" she panted. "Oh, you've gotten back!"

They now stood face to face.

"Oh yes," he laughed, with a gesture towards his throat of apology for his hoarseness; "did you think I was off for good?"

"No, but I was afraid"—she was shocked by the pallor of his usually ruddy face, the many evidences of fatigue upon him, the nervous way he stood holding his hat and cigar—"I was afraid you had met with disaster."

"But why did you feel that way?" he asked, reassuringly.

"Oh, from what Keith said in general, and Mr. Garner, too. They declared the road you took was full of desperadoes, and—"

"I might have known they would exaggerate the whole business," Carson said, with a smile. "Why, I've just come from Mam' Linda's. I went to tell her that Pete is all right and as sound as a dollar. He's in the charge of good, reliable friends of mine up there, and wholly out of danger. In fact, he's as happy as a lark. When I left him he was surrounded by a gang of as trifling scamps as himself bragging about his numerous escapes and—he's generous—my importance in the community we live in. Well, he's certainly been *important* enough lately."

"But did you not meet with—with any opposition at all?" Helen went on, insistently.

"Oh, well"—he hesitated, struck a match, and applied it to his already lighted cigar—"we lost our way, for one thing. You see, I was a little afraid to carry a light, and it was hard to make out the different sign-boards, and, all in all, it was a slow trip, but we got through all right. And hungry! Gee whiz! We struck a restaurant in the outskirts of Chattanooga about sunup, and while that fellow was cooking us some steak and making coffee we could have eaten him alive. If Mam' Linda could have seen her boy eat she would have no fears as to his bodily condition."

"But didn't you meet some men who stopped you?" Helen asked, staring steadily into his eyes.

He blinked, flicked the ashes from his cigar, and said:

"Yes, we did, and they were really on the war-path, but they seemed very reasonable, and when I had talked to them and explained the matter from our stand-point—why, they—they let us go."

They had gone into the grounds and were near the main walk when the gate was opened and a man came striding towards them. It was Jeff Braider.

"Oh, I've been looking for you everywhere, Carson," he cried, warmly, shaking Dwight's hand. "I heard you'd got back, but I wanted to see you with my own eyes. Lord, Lord, my boy, if I'd known the awful trouble I was getting you into I'd never have let you take that road. I've just heard the whole story. For genuine pluck and endurance you certainly take the rag off the bush. Why, nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand would have given up the game, but you, you young bull-dog—"

"Carson, Carson! are you down there?" It was a man's voice from an upper window.

"Yes, father, what is it?"

"Your mother wants to see you right now. She's waked up and is worrying. Come on in."

"You'll both excuse me for just a moment, I know," Carson said, as if glad of the interruption. "I'll be back presently. I haven't seen my mother since I returned, and she is very nervous and easily excited."

XXXIV

"O you are the only lady member of the secret gang that stole my prisoner!" the sheriff said, laughingly. "The boys told me all about it."

"I wasn't taken in till they had done all the work," Helen smiled. "I was only an honorary addition, elected more to keep my mouth shut than for any other service I could perform."

"Oh, *that* was it!" Braider laughed. "Well, they certainly put the thing through. I've mixed up in a lot of hair-raising scrapes in my time, but that kidnapping business was the brightest idea ever sprung from a man's head. This fellow Dwight is a corker. Did he tell you what he went through last night?"

"Not a thing," replied Helen; "the truth is, I have an idea he was trying to mislead me."

"Well, he certainly was if he didn't tell you he had the hardest fight for his life and that nigger's that ever a man made. You noticed how hoarse he was, didn't you? That is due to it. The poor chap was up all last night and drove the biggest part of to-day. I'll bet, strong as he is, he's as limber as a dish-rag."

"Then he really had trouble?" Helen breathed, heavily.

"Trouble! And he didn't mention it to you? Young men in this day and time certainly play their cards peculiar. When I was on the carpet we boys had a way of making the most to women folks of everything we did, and it was generally the loudest talker that won the game. But here I find this 'town dude,' as the country people call his sort, actually trying to make you think he went to Chattanooga last night in a Pullman car. Good Lord, it gives me the all-overs to think of it! I heard all about it. I met a man who was along, and he told me the whole thing from start to finish."

"What was it?" Helen asked, breathlessly.

"Why," answered Braider, casting a glance towards Dwight's as if fearful of being overheard, "I didn't know it, but somehow the mob had got wind of what Carson intended to do, and, bless you, they were waiting for him near the State line primed and cocked. The boy's enemies had fixed him. They had worked the mob up to the highest pitch of fury with all sorts of tales against Pete. They had produced men who had really heard the nigger threaten to harm Johnson, and they themselves testified that Carson was saving the nigger only to capture black voters as their friend and benefactor. The mob was mad as Tucker at him for tricking them the other night, and they certainly had it in for him."

"They were mad at Carson *personally*, then?" Helen said.

"*Were* they? They were ready to drink his blood. They halted the buggy, took them both out, and tied them."

"Tied Car—" Helen's voice died away, and she stood staring at Braider unable to speak.

"Yes, they tied them both and led them off into the woods. They then fastened Pete to a stump and piled sticks and brush around him and told Carson they were going to make him see them burn the boy alive and when that was done they intended to silence his tongue by shooting him dead in his tracks."

Helen covered her face with her hands and stifled a groan.

"His power of gab saved him, Miss Helen," Braider went on. "It saved them both. It wasn't any begging, either; that wouldn't have gone with that sort of gang. With his hands and feet tied he began to talk—that's what ails his throat now—and the man that confessed it to me said such rapid fire of words and argument never before rolled from human lips. He told them he knew they would kill him; that they were a merciless band of desperadoes; but he was going to fire some truths at them that they would remember after he was gone. I'm no talker, Miss Helen. I can't possibly repeat what the man told me. He said at first Carson couldn't get their attention, but after awhile, when they were getting ready to apply the match, something in Dwight's voice caught their ear and they paused. He talked and talked, until a man behind him, in open defiance, cut the cords that held his hands. Later another cut his feet loose, and then Carson walked boldly up to Pete and stood beside him, and although a growl of fury was still in the air he kept talking. The man that told me about it said Carson

first picked up one of the sticks around the prisoner and hurled it from him to emphasize something he said, then another and another, until the mob saw him kicking the sticks away and roaring out an offer to fight the whole bunch single-handed. Gee whiz! I'd have given ten years of my life to have heard it. He hadn't a thing to say in favor of Pete's general character; he said the boy was an idle, fun-loving, shiftless fellow, but he was innocent of the crime charged against him and he should not die like a dog. He spoke of the fine characters of Pete's mother and father and of the old woman's grief, and then, Miss Helen, he said something about *you*, and the man that told me about it said that one thing did more to soften and quell the crowd than anything else."

"He said something about *me?*" Helen cried. "Me?"

"Yes; no names was mentioned, but they knew who he meant," Braider went on. "Carson spoke of your family and of the close bond of human sympathy between it and all the blacks that had once belonged to your folks, and said that the daughter of that house, the most beautiful womanly character that had ever blessed the South, was praying at that moment for the safety of the prisoner, and if they carried out their plans she would shed tears of sorrow. 'Your intentions are good,' Carson said. 'You are all sincere men acting, as you see it, in the interests of the women of the South. Listen to this gentlewoman's prayer uttered through my mouth to-night for mercy and human justice.'

"It fairly swept them off their feet, Miss Helen.

The man that told me about it said he never saw a more thoroughly shamed lot of men in his life; he said they released Pete and led the horses around and stood like mile-posts with nothing to say as Carson drove away. The man that told me said he'd bet ninety per cent. of the gang would vote for Dwight this fall. But I must be going; if that young buck knew I'd been telling you all this he'd give *me* a tongue-lashing, and I don't want any of his sort in mine."

Helen waited for about ten minutes alone on the grass—waited for Carson. When he finally came out and hurried towards her, he found her with her handkerchief pressed over her eyes.

"Why, what is the matter, Helen?" he asked, in sudden concern.

She remained silent for a moment, and then with glistening eyes she looked up at him as he stood pale and disturbed, the plaster still marking his wound and gleaming in the starlight.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked, laying her hand tenderly on his arm, her voice holding cadences of ineffable sweetness.

"Oh, Braider's been talking to you, I see!" Dwight said, with a frown of displeasure.

"Why, didn't you tell me, Carson?" she repeated, putting her disengaged hand on his arm and raising her appealing face till it was close to his.

He shrugged his shoulders, still frowning, and then said, flushing under her urgent gaze: "Because, Helen, you've already seen and heard too much of this awful stuff. It really is not fit for a gentle, sensitive girl like you."

"Oh, Carson," she cried, her suffused face held even closer to his, "you are the dearest, sweetest boy in the world!" and she turned and left him, left him alone there in his fatigue, alone under the starlight to fight as he had never fought before the deathless yearning for her.

XXXV

TWO weeks went by. Great changes had come over the temper of the insurgent mountain people. They had gradually come to accept the rescue of Pete Warren as a chance bit of real justice that was as admirable as it was unusual and heroic. A sufficient number of men had come forward and testified to Sam Dudlow's ante-mortem confession to exculpate Carson's client, and some who had a leaning towards Dwight's cause politically were hinting, on occasion, that surely a man who would take such a plucky stand for the rights of a humble negro would not be a mere figure-head in the legislature of the State. At all events, there was one man who ground his teeth in secret rage over the subtle turn of affairs, and that man was Wiggin. He still busied himself sowing the seditious seed of race hatred wherever he found receptive soil, but, unfortunately for his cause, in many places where unbridled fury had once ploughed the ground a sort of frost had fallen. Most men whose passions are unduly wrought undergo a certain sort of relapse, and Wiggin found many who were not so much interested in their support of him as formerly when an open and defiant enemy was to be defeated.

Wiggin was puzzled more about Jeff Braider than

any one of his former supporters. Braider was too good a politician to admit that he had in any way aided Carson Dwight by a betrayal of the plot against him, for that was exactly the sort of thing Wiggin could hold out to his constituents as the act of a man disloyal to his official post, for, guilty or innocent, the prisoner should have been held, as any law-abiding citizen would admit. As to Pete's guilt Wiggin's opinion was unchanged, and he made no bones of saying so; he believed, so he declared, that Pete was Dudlow's accomplice, and the dastardly manner of his release was a shame and a disgrace to any white man's community.

As for Jeff Braider, he was in such high feather over the success of his swerving towards the right in the nick of time that he refrained from drink and wore better clothing. He liked the situation. He felt, now, that he could serve his country, his God, and himself with a clear conscience, for Carson Dwight looked like a winner and they had agreed to work together.

Helen Warren, after her impulsive leaning towards her first sweetheart that night in the garden, had permitted herself to undergo the keenest suffering which was due to her strangely unsettled mind. Was she strictly honest? she asked herself. She had openly encouraged a good man to hope that she would finally become his wife, and the letters she was receiving from him daily were of the tenderest, most appealing nature, showing that Sanders' love for her and faith in her fair dealing were too deeply grounded to be easily uprooted. Besides, as he perhaps had the right to do, the Augusta man had

spoken of his hopes to his mother and sister, and those sympathetic ladies had written Helen adroit letters which all but plainly alluded to the "understanding" as being the forerunner of a most welcome family event.

Many times had the poor girl seated herself to respond to these communications, and found herself absolutely unequal to the performance in the delicate spirit that the occasion demanded. The window of her room, at which her writing-desk stood, looked out over the garden at Dwight's, and the very spot where she had left Carson that memorable night was in open view. How could she throw herself into anything, yes *anything* pertaining to her compact with Sanders while the ever-present thrill and ecstasy of that moment was permeating her? What had it really meant — that ecstatic yearning to kiss the lips so close to hers, the lips which had quivered in dumb adoration and despair as he strove to keep from her ken the suffering he had undergone in her service?

One day she rebelled against the painful, almost morbid, state of indecision that was on her and firmly decided that there was but one honorable course to pursue and that was in every way to be true to her tacit promise to the absent suitor, and in a spasm of resolution she was about to set herself to the correspondence just mentioned when Mam' Linda was announced. The old woman had just returned from a visit to Chattanooga to see her son and in addition to news of his well-being she had many other things to say. The letters would have to wait, Helen told herself, and her old nurse

was admitted. Linda remained two hours, and Helen sat the while in a veritable dream as the old woman gave Pete's version of Carson Dwight's conduct before the mob on the lonely mountain road. And when Linda had gone, Helen turned to her desk. There lay the white sheets fluttering in the summer breeze, mutely beckoning her back to stern reality. Helen stared at them and then with a little cry of pain she lowered her head to her folded arms and wept—not for Sanders in his complacent, epistolary hopefulness, but for the one who had bravely borne more than his burden of pain, and upon whom she had resolved to put still more. Helen told herself that it would not be the first time *ideal* happiness had not been a factor in a sensible marriage. The time would come, in her life, as it had in the lives of so many other women, when she would look back on her present feeling for Carson, and wonder how she ever could have fancied—but, no, that would be unfair to him, to his wealth of spirituality, to his gentleness, his courage to—to Carson *just as he was*, to Carson who must always, always be the same, different from all living men. Yes, he was to go out of her life. Out of her life—how strange! and yet it would be so, for she would be the *wife* of—

She shuddered and sat staring at the floor.

XXXVI

WIGGIN was no insignificant opponent; he held weapons as powerful as fire applied to inflammable material. The papers were filled with accounts of race rioting in all parts of the South, and in his speeches on the stump, through the length and breadth of the county, he kept his particular version of the bloody happenings well before his hearers.

"This is a white man's country," was the key-note of all his hot tirades, "and the white man is bound to rule."

He accomplished one master-stroke. There was to be a considerable gathering of the Confederate veterans at an annual picnic at Shell Valley, a few miles from Springtown, and by no mean diplomacy Wiggin had, by shrewdly ingratiating himself into the good graces of the committee of arrangements, managed to have himself invited as the only orator of the occasion. He meant to make it the greatest day of the campaign, and in some respects, as will be seen, he did.

The farmers came from all parts of the county in their best attire, in their best turnouts, from plain, springless road-wagons to glittering buggies. The wood which stretched on all sides from the spring was filled with vehicles, horses, mules, and even oxen.

The grizzled veterans, battered as much by post-bellum hardship and toil as by war, came with their wives, sons, and daughters, and brought baskets to the rich contents of which any man was welcome. A crude platform had been erected near the spring under the shadiest trees, and upon this the speaker of the day was to hold forth. Behind the little impromptu table holding a glass pitcher of water and a tumbler, erected for Wiggin's special benefit, were a number of benches made of undressed boards. And to these seats the wives and daughters of the leading citizens were invited.

Jabe Parsons, being a man of importance as a land-owner and an old soldier, was instructed on his arrival in his rickety buggy to escort his wife, who was gorgeously arrayed in a new green-and-red checked gingham gown with a sun-bonnet to match, to the front seat on the platform, and he obeyed with a sort of ploughman's swagger that indicated his pride in the possession of a wife so widely known and respected. Indeed, no woman who had arrived—and she had come later than the rest—had caused such a ripple of comment. Always liked for her firmness in any stand she took in matters of church or social life, since her Amazonian rescue of Pete Warren from the very halter of death she was even more popular. The women of the county had not given much thought to the actual guilt or innocence of the boy, but they wanted Mrs. Parsons—as a specimen of their undervalued sex — to be right in that instance, as she had always been about every other matter upon which she had stood flat-footed, and so they all but cheered her on this first public ap-

pearance after conduct which had been so widely talked about.

Really, if Wiggin could have had the reception Mrs. Parsons received from beaming eyes and faces he would have felt that his star, which had been rather below the horizon than above of late, had become a fixed ornament in the political heavens. But Wiggin gave no thought to her, and there's where he made a mistake. Women were beneath the notice of serious men, Wiggin thought, except as a means of controlling a husband's vote, and there he made another mistake. It would have been well for him if he could have noticed the fires of contempt in Mrs. Parsons' eyes as he made his way through the crowd, bowing right and left, and took his seat in the only chair on the platform, and proceeded, of course, to take a drink of water.

A country parson, while the multitude sat upon the grass, crude benches, buggy-cushions, or heaps of pine needles, opened the ceremonies with a long-winded prayer, composed of selections from all the prayers he knew by rote and ending with something resembling a benediction. Then a young lady was asked to recite a dramatic poem relating to the "Lost Cause," and she did it with such telling effect that the gray heads of the old soldiers sank to their chests, and, in memory of camp-fire, battle-field, and comrades left in unmarked graves, the tears flowed down furrowed cheeks and strong forms were shaken by sobs.

It was into this holy silence that the unmoved, preoccupied Wiggin rose to cast his burning brand. Through curtains of tears he laid his fuse to hidden magazines of powder.

"I believe in getting right down to business," he began, in a crisp, rasping voice that reached well to the outskirts of the crowd. "There's nothing to-day that is as important to you, fellow-citizens, as the correct use of the ballot. I am a candidate for your votes. I mean to represent you in the next legislature, and I don't intend to be foiled by the tricks, lies, and underhand work of a gang of stuck-up town men who laugh at your honest appearance and homely ways. God knows you are the salt of the earth, and when I hear men of that stamp making fun of you behind your backs it makes me mad. My father was a mountain farmer, and when men throw dirt on folks of your sort they throw it into the tenderest recesses of my being and it smarts like salt in a fresh cut."

There was applause from a group in the edge of the crowd led by long, tall Dan Willis, and it spread uncertainly to other parts of the gathering.

"Hit 'em, blast 'em, hit 'em, Wiggin," a man near Willis shouted; "hit 'em!"

"You bet I'll hit 'em, brother," Wiggin panted, as he rolled up his coat-sleeve and pulled down his rumpled cuff. "That's what I'm here for. I'm here, by the holy stars, to show you people a few things which have been overlooked. I intend to go into the history of this case. I want you all to look back a few weeks. A gang of worthless negroes in Darley became so bad and openly defiant in their rowdyism that they were literally running the town. Whenever they would be hauled up before the mayor for disgraceful conduct some old slave-holder, who used to own them or their daddies, would come up

and pay their fine and they'd be turned loose again. The black scamps became so spoiled that whenever country people would come in town they would laugh at them, imitate their talk, call them po' white trash, and push them off the sidewalks. Some of you mountain men stood it, God bless your Caucasian bones, just as long as human endurance would let you, and then you formed a secret gang that went into Darley one night and pulled their dives and gave them a lashing on their bare backs that brought about a reform. As every Darley man will tell you, it purified the very air. The negroes were put to work, and they didn't hover like swarms of buzzards round the public square. All of which showed plainly that the cowhide was the only corrective that the niggers knew about or cared a cent for. Trying them in a mayor's court was elevating them to the level of a white man, and they liked it."

"You bet!" cried out Dan Willis, and a laugh went round which spurred Wiggin to further flights of vituperation.

"Now to my next step in this history," he thundered. "In that gang of soundly thrashed scamps there were two who were chums, as I could prove by sworn testimony. Those black fiends refused to submit passively. They skulked around making sullen threats and trying to incite race riot. Failing in this, what did they do? One of them, being hand in glove with Carson Dwight, who says he's going to beat me in this election, applied to him for a job and was sent out to Dwight's farm near to that of Abe Johnson, who is thought—by some—to have been the leader of the thrashing delegation. That

nigger, Pete Warren, was promptly joined by his black pal, and Johnson and his wife, one of the best women in this State, were foully murdered in the dead hours of the night as they lay sleeping in their beds. Who did it? *I* know who did it. *You* know who did it. Fellow-citizens, those two niggers, with their backs still smarting and their tongues still wagging, were the devils who did the deed."

Low muttering was heard throughout the crowd as men turned to one another to make comment on the statement. In its incipiency it meant no more, perhaps, than that reason, hard driven by rising emotion, was honestly striving to keep the equitable poise which had recently governed it, but it sounded to the thoughtless, inflammable element like sullen, swelling acquiescence to the bitter charges, and they took it up. Wiggin paused, drank from the tumbler, and watched his flashing fuse in its sinuous course through the assemblage.

Mrs. Parsons was near the edge of the platform, and Pole Baker, rising from the grass near by, where he had been coolly whittling a stick, stealthily approached her.

"Great goodness, Mrs. Parsons," he whispered in her ear, "that skunk is cutting a wide swath to-day, sure! He could git up a lynching-bee right here in five minutes if he had any sort of material. The only thing of the right color is that old woman selling ginger-cakes and cider at the spring. Don't you think I'd better slip down and tell her to go home?"

"It might save the old thing's neck," Mrs. Parsons answered, in the same half-amused spirit. "If he

keeps on I don't think I'll be able to hold my seat. Why don't you say something?"

"Me? Oh, I ain't no public speaker, Mrs. Parsons. That oily gab of Wiggin's would twist me into a hundred knots, and Carson Dwight would cuss me out for making matters worse. I never feel like talking unless I'm drunk, and then I'm tongue-tied."

"Well, I don't git drunk and I don't git tongue-tied!" grunted Mrs. Parsons; "and I tell you, Pole, if that fool keeps on I'll either talk or bust."

"Well, don't bust—we need women like you right now," Baker smiled. "But the truth is, if some'n' ain't done for our side this thing will sweep Carson Dwight clean out of the field."

"Yes, because men are born fools," retorted the woman. "Look at their faces, the last one of them right now is mad enough to lynch a nigger baby, and a *gal* baby at that."

With a laugh, Pole went back to his seat on the grass for Wiggin was thundering again.

"What happened *next?*" he demanded, bending over his table, a hand on each end of it, his keen, alert eyes sweeping like twin search-lights into the deeps of the countenances turned to him. "Why, just this and nothing more. Knowing that the jack-leg lawyers of that measly town would clog the wheels of justice for their puny fees, and hold those fiends over for other hellishness, some of you rose and took the law into your own hands. You jerked one to glory as quick as you laid hands on him, and part of you were hard on the track of his mate, when my honorable opponent, not wanting to lose the fee he was to get for pulling the case through, met the mob and

managed, by a lot of grand-stand playing and solemn promises to see that the negro was legally tried, to put him in jail.

"Those promises he kept like the honorable gentleman he is," Wiggin snorted, tossing back his hair in white rage and rolling up his sleeves again. "You know how he kept his word to the public. He organized a secret band of his dirty associates in town, dressed 'em up like White Caps, and they went to the jail and took the nigger out. Then they hid him in a cellar of a store where you all buy supplies, out of the goodness of your patriotic souls, and later sent him in a new suit of clothes to Chattanooga, where he is now engaged in the same sort of life that he was here, an idle, good-for-nothing, lazy tramp, who says he's as good as any white man that ever wore shoe-leather and no doubt thinks he will some day marry a white woman."

The rising storm burst, and Wiggin stood above it calmly viewing it in all its subdued and open fury. Shouts of rage rent the air. Men with blanched faces, men with gleaming eyes, rose from their seats, as if a call to their manhood for instantaneous action had been sounded, and walked about muttering threats, grinding their teeth, and clinching their brawny hands.

"Ah, ha!" Wiggin bellowed; "I see you catch my idea. But I'm not through. Just wait!"

He paused to drink again, and Pole Baker, with a grave look in his honest eye approached the sculpturesque shape of Mrs. Parsons and nudged her.

"Did you ever in yore life?" he said; but staring him in the eyes steadily, the woman seemed not to

hear what he was saying. Her lower lip was twitching and there was an expression of settled determination in her eyes. Baker, wondering, moved back to his place, for Wiggin had levelled his guns again.

"And the man that was at the head of it, what is he doing right now? Why he's leaning back in his rocking-chair in his law-office drawing a fat pension from his rich old daddy, taking in big fees for such legal work as that, and fairly splitting his sides laughing at you folks, who he calls a lot of sap-headed hillbillies, fit only for hopping clods and feeding hogs on swill and pussley weeds. Oh, that was a picnic—that trick he and those town rowdies put up on you! It was a gentle rebuke to you, and when he gets to the legislature he says he—"

"Legislature be damned!" Dan Willis roared, and the crowd took up his cry.

"Oh yes, *you'll* vote him in," Wiggin went on, with a vast air of mock depression and reproach; "you think you won't now, but when he gets up and tells his side of it with a forced tear or two, your women folks will say, 'Poor boy!' and tell you what to do at the polls."

Comprehensive applause greeted the speaker as he sat down. Hats were thrown in the air and Dan Willis organized and gave three resounding cheers.

XXXVII

IF the audience was surprised at what next happened, what may be said of the astounded candidate when he saw the powerful form of Mrs. Parsons rise from her seat near him and calmly stride with the tread of an angry man to the speaker's stand and take off her curtained bonnet and begin to wave it up and down to indicate that she wanted them to keep their places?

"I never made a speech in my life," she gulped—"that is, not outside of an experience meetin'. But, people, ef this ain't an experience meeting I never went to one. Ef the Lord God had told me Hisse'f in a blazonin' voice from heaven that any human bein' could take such a swivelled-up, contemptible shape as the man that's yelled at you like a sick calf to-day, I never would have believed it. I've got a right to be heard. I couldn't set still. It would give me St. Vitus's dance to try it ten minutes longer. I've got a right to talk, because, friends and neighbors, this contemptible creature has, in a roundabout way, accused *me* of law-breaking, an'—"

"Why, madam!" Wiggin gasped, as he half rose and stared around in utter bewilderment. "I don't even *know* you! I never laid eyes on you before this minute—"

"Well, take a good look at me now!" Mrs. Parsons hurled at him, "for I'm the woman that helped Pete Warren git away from the sheriff, when your sort were after the poor, silly nigger to lynch him for a crime he had nothin' to do with. If you are right in all your empty tirade this morning, I'm a woman unfit for the community I live in, and if I have to share that honor with a man of your stamp, I'll lynch myself on the first tree I come to."

She turned from the astounded, suddenly crest-fallen speaker to the open-mouthed audience.

"Listen to me, men, women, and children!" she thundered, in a voice that was as steady and clear in resonance as a bell. "If there was ever a crafty, spider-like politician on earth you have listened to him spout to-day. He's picked out the one big sore-spot in your kind natures and he's punched it, and jabbed it, and lacerated it with every sort of thorn he could stick into it, till he gained his aim in makin' you one and all so blind with rage at the black race that you are about to overlook the good in yore own.

"There are two sides to this matter, and you would be pore excuses for men if you jest looked at one side of it. Carson Dwight is the other candidate, and I don't know but one thing agin his character, and that is that he ever allowed his name to be put up along with this man's. It's a funny sort of race, anyway—run by a greyhound and a jack-rabbit."

A ripple of amusement passed over many faces, and there were several open laughs over Wiggin's evident discomfiture. He started to rise, but voices from all parts of the gathering cried out: "Sit down, Wiggin! Sit down, it ain't yore time!"

"No, it *hain't* his time," said Mrs. Parsons, unrolling her bonnet like a switchman's flag and waving it to and fro. "I started to tell you about Carson Dwight. He can't help bein' born in a rich family any more'n I could in a pore one, but I'm here to tell you that since I had the moral backbone to aid that nigger to git away I've thanked God a thousand times that I did that much to help genuine justice along. I could listen to forty million men like this candidate expound his views and it wouldn't alter me one smidgen in the belief that Carson Dwight has acted only as a true Christian would. He knew that nigger. He had known him, I'm told, from childhood up. He knew the sort of black stock the boy sprung from, an' the white family he was trained in, an' he simply didn't believe he was guilty of that crime. Believing that, thar wasn't but one honest thing for him to do, and that was to fight for the pore thing's rights. He knew that most of the racket agin the boy was got up by t'other candidate, and he set about to save the pore, beggin' darky's neck from the halter or his body from the burning brush-heap. Did he do it at a sacrifice? Huh, answer me that! Where did you ever see another politician on the eve of his election that would take up such a' issue as that, infuriating nearly every person who had promised to vote for him? Where will you find a young man with enough stamina to stand on a horse-block over the heads of hundreds of howling demons, and with one wound from a pistol on his brow, darin' 'em to shoot ag'in and holdin' on like a bull-dog to the pore cowerin' wreck at his feet?"

There was applause, slight at first, but increasing. There were, too, under Mrs. Parson's eye many softening faces, and into them she continued to throw her heart-felt appeal.

"You've been told this morning that Carson Dwight makes fun of us country people. I'll admit I saw him do it once, but it was *only* once. He made fun of a mountain chap over at Darley one circus day. The fellow had insulted a nice country gal, and Carson Dwight made a *lot* of fun of him. He hammered the dirty scamp's face till it looked like a ripe tomato that the rats had been gnawin'."

At this point there was laughter loud and prolonged.

"Now, listen," the speaker went on. "I want you to hear something, and I don't want you ever to forget it. I got it straight from a truthful man who was there. The night you mountain men gathered from all sides like the rising of the dead on Judgment Day, and got ready to march to Darley to take that boy out of jail, the news reached Carson Dwight just an hour or so before the appointed time. He got a few friends together and told them if they cared for him to make one more effort to stop the trouble.

"Gentlemen, to some extent they was like you. They wasn't—I'm told—much interested in the fate of that nigger, one way or another, and so they sat thar in judgment over Carson Dwight, and tried to argue 'im down. I'm told by a respectable man who was thar" (and here Pole Baker lowered his head till his eyes were out of sight and continued to whittle his stick) "that nothin' feazed 'im. Pity was in his big, boyish heart, and it looked out of his eyes and clogged up his voice. They told him it

meant ruination to all his political hopes, and that it would turn his daddy against him for good and all. But he said he didn't care. They held out agin him a long time, and then one thing he said won 'em over—one thing. Kin you imagine what that was, friends and neighbors? It was this: Carson Dwight said he loved you mountain men with all his heart; he said no better or braver blood ever flowed in human veins than yours; he said he knew you *thought* you was right, but that you hadn't had the chance to discover what he had found out, and that was that Pete Warren was innocent and as harmless as a baby, and that—now, listen!—that he knew the time would come when you'd be convinced of the truth and carry regret for your haste to your graves. 'It is because,' he told them, 'I want to save men that I love from remorse and sorrow that I am in for this thing!' Fellow-citizens, that shot went home. Those worthless 'town dudes,' as they was called just now, saved you from committing a crime against yourselves an' God on high. Did any human bein' ever see a better illustration than that of the duty of enlightened folks to-day—the duty of them who, with divine sight, see great truths—to lead others in the right direction? As God Almighty smiles over you to-day in this broad sunlight, that gang in that store, headed by a new Joseph, was an' are the truest and best friends you ever had."

There was no open applause, but Mrs. Parsons saw something in the melting faces before her that was infinitely more encouraging, and after a moment's pause, and leaning slightly on the table, she went on:

"Before I set down, I want to say one word about this big race question, anyway. I'm just a plain woman, but I read papers an' I've thought about it a lot. We hear some white folks say that the education the niggers are now gettin' is the prime cause of so much crime amongst the blacks—they say this in spite of the fact that it is always the uneducated niggers that commit the rascality. No, my friends, it ain't education that's the cause, it is the *lack* of it. Education ain't just what is learnt in school-books. It is anything that makes folks higher an' better. Before the war niggers was better educated, for they had the education that come from bein' close to the white race an' profitin' by the'r example. After slavery was abolished the poor, simple numskulls, great, overgrown, fun-lovin' children, was turned loose without advice or guidin' hand, an' the worst part of 'em went downhill. Slavery was education, and I'll bet the Lord had a hand in it, for it has lifted a race from the jungles of Africa to a civilized land full of free schools. So I say, teach 'em the difference between right an' wrong, an' then let 'em work out their own salvation.

"Who in the name of common-sense is to do this if it ain't you of the superior race? *But!* wait a minute, think! How can you possibly teach 'em what law an' order is without knowin' a little about it yourselves? How can you learn a nigger what justice means when he sees his brother, son, or father, shot dead in his tracks or hung, like a scare-crow to the limb of a tree because some lower grade black man a hundred miles off has committed a dastardly

deed? No sensible white man ever thought of puttin' the two races on equality. The duty of the white blood is always to keep ahead of the black, and it will. This candidate openly declares that the time is coming when the negroes will overpower the whites. A man that has as poor an opinion of his own race as that ought to be kicked out of it. Now I can't vote, but I want every woman in this crowd that believes I know what I'm talkin' about to see that her brother, father, or husband votes for a member of the legislature that knows what law an' order means, an' not for a red-handed anarchist who would lay this country in ruins to gain his own puny aims. That's all I've got to say."

When she had finished there was still no applause. They had learned that it was unseemly to make a demonstration at church, when deeply moved by a sermon, and they had heard something to-day that had lifted them as high under her sway as they had sunken low under Wiggin's. The formal part of the exercises was over, and they proceeded to spread out the contents of their baskets. Wiggin, after his successful ascent, had fallen with something like a thud. He saw Mrs. Parsons helped from the platform by her proudly flushing husband and instantly surrounded by people anxious to offer congratulations. Wiggin shuddered for he stood quite alone. Those who were in sympathy with him seemed afraid to openly signify it. Even Dan Willis lurked back under the trees, his face flushed with liquor and inward rage.

Pole Baker, however, was more thoughtful of the candidate's comfort. With a queer twinkle of amuse-

ment in his eyes, and polishing, with the dexterity of a carver of cherry-stones, his little stick, he approached the candidate.

"Say, Wiggin," he drawled out, "I want to ax you a question."

"All right, Baker, what is it?" the candidate asked, absent-mindedly.

"Don't you remember tellin' me," Pole began, "that you never had in all yore life met a man that made better an' truer predictions about things to come than I did?"

"Yes, I think so, Baker—yes, I remember now," answered Wiggin. "You do seem to have a head that way. Some men have more than others, a sort of foresight or intuition."

Pole chuckled. "You remember I said Teddy Rusefelt would whip the socks off of Parker. I'm a Democrat an' always will be, but I kin see things that are goin' to be agin me as plain as them I'm prayin' for. Well, you remember I was called a traitor jest beca'se I told what was comin', but I hit the nail on the head, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," admitted the downcast candidate.

"An' I was right about the majority Towns would git for the State senate, Mayhew for solicitor, an' Tim Bloodgood for the last legislature."

"Yes, you were, I remember that," said Wiggin.

"I hit it on the Governor's race to a gnat's heel, too, didn't I?" Pole pursued, his keen eyes fixed on those of the man before him.

"Yes, you did," admitted Wiggin; "you really seem to have remarkable foresight."

"Well, then," said Baker, "I've got a prediction to make about your race agin Carson Dwight."

"Oh, you have!" exclaimed Wiggin, now all attention.

"Yes, and this time I'd bet my two arms and the first joint of my right leg agin a pinch o' snuff that Carson 'll beat you worse than a man was ever whipped in his life."

"You think so, Baker?" Wiggin was trying to sneer.

"I don't think anything about it; I *know* it," said Pole.

Wiggin stared at the ground a moment aimlessly, then he said, doggedly, and yet with an evident desire for information at any sort of fountain-head:

"What makes you think I'm beat, Baker?"

"Because you've showed you hain't no politician, an' you've got a born one to beat. For one thing, you've stirred up a hornet's nest. Women, when they set the'r heads agin a'body, are devils in petticoats, an' the one that presided this mornin' has got more influence than forty men. Before you are a day older every man who has a wife, mother, or sweetheart will be afraid to speak to you in broad daylight. Then ag'in, no candidate ever won a race on a platform of pure hate an' revenge. You made that crowd as mad as hell just now, while you was belchin' out that stuff, but as soon as Sister Parsons showed 'em what a friend of the'rs Dwight was they melted to him like thin snow after a rain."

XXXVIII

ONE morning, three days later, Pole Baker slouched down the street from the wagon-yard and went into Garner & Dwight's office, finding Garner at his desk. The mountaineer looked cautiously about the room and asked, in a guarded tone:

"Is Carson anywhars about?"

"Not down yet," Garner said. "His mother was not so well last night, and it may be that he had to sit up with her and has overslept himself."

"Well, I'm glad he ain't here," Baker said, "for I want to speak to you about him sorter in private."

"Anything gone wrong?" Garner asked, looking up curiously.

"Well, not yet, Bill, but I believe in takin' the bull by the horns before he takes you in the stomach. I've been powerful afeared for some time that Carson and Dan Willis would run together, and I dread it now more than ever. In the first place, I don't like the look in Carson's eye. He knows that devil has been on his track, and it has worked him up powerful; besides, Willis is more rampant than ever."

"What's gone wrong with him?" Garner inquired, uneasily.

"Well, for a while, you know, he was full of hope

that Wiggin was goin' to beat Carson, and that sorter satisfied him, but now that Wiggin is losin' ground, Dan don't see revenge that way. Besides, since old Sister Parsons made that rip-roarin' speech respectable folks are turnin' the'r backs on Wiggin and all his backers. The gal Willis was to marry has throwed 'im clean over, an' the preacher at Hill Crest just as good as called his name out in meetin' in talkin' of the open lawlessness that is spreadin' over the land. Oh, Willis is mad—he's got all hell in 'im, an' he's makin' more threats agin Dwight. Now, to-morrow is Friday, an' the next day is Saturday, an' on Saturday Dan Willis is comin' in town. I got that straight. Wiggin is a snake in the grass, and he's constantly naggin' Dan about his row with Carson, and it will take slick work on our part to prevent serious trouble. Wiggin wouldn't care. If the two met he'd profit either way, for if Carson was killed he'd have the field to himself, an' if Carson killed Willis the boy 'd have to stand trial for his life, an' a man wouldn't run much of a political race with a charge of bloody murder hangin' over 'im."

"True — true as Gospel!" Garner frowned; "but what plan had you in mind, Pole—I mean what plan to obviate trouble?"

"Why, you see," the mountaineer replied, "I 'lowed you might be able to trump up some business excuse for gittin' Carson out o' town next Saturday."

"Well, I think I can," Garner cried, his eyes brightening. "The truth is, I was to go myself over to see old man Purdy, the other side of Springtown, to take his deposition in an important matter, but

I can pretend to be tied here and foist it onto Carson."

"Good; that's the stuff!" Pole said, with a smile of satisfaction. "But for the love of mercy don't let Dwight dream what's in the wind or he'd die rather than budge an inch."

So it was that Carson the following Friday afternoon made his preparations for a ride on horseback through the country, his plan being to spend the night at the little hotel at Springtown and ride on to Purdy's farm the next morning after breakfast, and return to Darley Saturday evening shortly after dark.

His horse stood at the hitching-rack in front of the office, and, ready for his journey, he was going out when Garner called him back.

"Are you armed, my boy?" Garner questioned.

"Not now, old man," Dwight said. "I've carried that two pounds of cold metal on my hip till I got tired of it and left it in my room. If I can't live in a community without being a walking arsenal I'll leave the country."

"You'd better make an exception of to-day, anyhow," Garner said, reaching down into the drawer of his desk. "Here, take my gun."

"Well, I might accidentally need it," Dwight said, thoughtfully, as he took the weapon and put it into his pocket.

As he was unfastening his horse, Dr. Stone crossed the street from the opposite sidewalk and approached him.

"Where are you off to this time?" the old man asked.

Carson explained as he tightened the girth of his saddle and pulled the blanket into place.

"Well, I'd get back as soon as I could well manage it," the physician said, his eyes on the ground.

Carson started and looked grave.

"Why, doctor, you are not afraid—"

"Oh, she's doing very well, my boy, but—well, there is no use keeping back anything from anybody as much concerned as you are. The truth is, she's very low. I think we can pull her through all right, with care and attention, but I feel that I ought to warn you and lecture you a little, too. You see, as I've often said, she is a woman who suffers mightily from worry and excitement of any kind, and your adventures of late have not had the best effect on her health. I hope it's all over and that you will settle down to something more steady. Her life really is in your hands more than mine, for if you should have any more trouble of a serious nature it would simply kill her. I only mention this," the doctor continued, laying his hand on the young man's arm half apologetically, "because there is some little talk going round that you and Dan Willis haven't quite settled your differences yet. If I were in your place, Carson, I'd take a good deal from that man before I'd have trouble with him right now, considering the critical condition your mother is in. A shooting-scrape on top of all the rest, even if you got the best of it, would simply send that good woman to her grave."

"Then we won't have any shooting-scrape!" Carson said, his voice quivering. "You can depend on that, doctor."

The road Dwight took as the most direct way to his destination really passed within two miles of the home of Dan Willis, and yet the likelihood of his meeting the desperado never once crossed Carson's mind. In this, however, he was to meet with surprise. He had got well into the mountains, and, full of hope as to his campaign, was heartily enjoying a slow ride on his ambling horse through a narrow, shaded road, after leaving the heat of the open thoroughfare, when far ahead of him he saw a horseman at the side of the way pinning with his pocket-knife to the smooth bark of a sycamore-tree a white envelope. The distance was at first too great for Dwight to recognize the rider, though his object and occupation were soon evident, for suddenly wheeling on his rather skittish mount the man drew back about twenty paces from the tree, drew a revolver and began to fire at the target, sending one shot after the other, as rapidly as he could rein and spur his frightened animal to an approved distance and steadiness, until his weapon was empty. The marksman, evidently a mountaineer, as indicated by his wide-brimmed soft hat and easy gray shirt, thrust his hand into his trousers-pocket and took out sufficient cartridges for another round, and was thumbing them dexterously into their places when Carson drew near enough to recognize him.

A thrill, a sort of shock, certainly not due even to subconscious fear, passed over Dwight, and he almost drew upon his rein. Then a hot flush of shame rose in him and tingled through every nerve in his body, as he wondered if for one instant he could have feared the presence of any living man, armed or un-

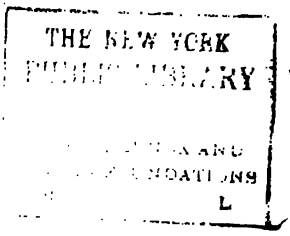
armed, and running his hand behind him to be sure that his own revolver was in place, and with his head well up he rode even more briskly forward. He had no thought of caution. The sharp warning Dr. Stone had given him so recently never entered his brain. That was the man who, on several occasions, had threatened to kill him, and who, Carson firmly believed, had once tried it. That there was to be grim trouble he did not doubt. Averting it after the manner of a coward was not thought of.

When the two riders were about a hundred yards apart, Dan Willis, hearing the fall of horses' hoofs, looked up suddenly. There was no mistaking the evolution of his facial expression from startled bewilderment to that of angry, bestial satisfaction. Uttering an unctuous grunt of delight, and with his revolver swinging easily against his brawny thigh, by the aid of his tense left hand the mountaineer drew his horse squarely into the very middle of the narrow road and there essayed to check him. The animal, quivering with excitement from the shots just fired over his head, was still restive and swerved tremblingly from side to side, but with prodding spur and fierce command Willis managed to keep him in the attitude of open opposition to Carson's passage, which was, as things go in the mountains, a threat not to be misunderstood.

Carson Dwight read the action well, and his blood boiled.

"Halt thar!" Dan Willis suddenly called out, in a sharp, fierce tone, and as he spoke he raised his revolver till the hand holding it rested on the high pommel of his saddle.

"'HALT THAR!' DAN WILLIS SUDDENLY CALLED OUT"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"Why should I halt?" almost to his surprise rang clearly from Dwight's lips. "This is a public road!"

"Not for *yore* sort," was hurled back. "It's entirely too narrow for a gentleman an' a dog to pass on. *I'm* goin' to pass, but I'll walk my hoss over yore body. I've been praying for this chance, an' God or Hell, one or t'other, sent it to me. Some folks say you've got grit. I've my doubts about it, for you are the hardest man to meet I ever wanted to settle with, but if you've got any sand in yore gizzard you've got a chance to spill some of it now."

"I don't want to have trouble with you," Dwight controlled himself enough to say. "Bloodshed is not in my line."

"But you've *got* to fight!" Willis roared. "If you don't I'll ride up to you an' spit in yore damned, sneakin' face."

"Well, I hardly think you'll do that," said Carson, his rage overwhelming him. "But before we go into this thing tell me, for my own satisfaction if you are the one who tried to kill me the night Pete Warren was jailed."

"You bet I was, and damned sorry I missed." Willis's revolver was raised. The sharp click of the hammer sounded like the snapping of a metallic twig. Then alive but to one thought, and that of alert and instantaneous self-preservation, Dwight quickly drew his weapon. With his teeth ground together, his breath coming fast, he took as careful aim as was possible at the shifting horseman, conscious of the advantage his antagonist had over him in the calmness of his own mount. He saw a puff of smoke before Willis's eyes, heard the sharp report

of the mountaineer's revolver, and wondered if the ball had lodged in his body.

"I am fully justified," something within him seemed to say as he pressed the trigger of his revolver. His hand had never been more steady, his aim never better, and yet the smile and taunting laugh of Willis proved to him that he had missed. The eyes of his assailant gleamed like those of an infuriated beast as he tried to steady his rearing and plunging horse to shoot again. Once more he fired, but the shot went wild, and with a snort of fear his horse broke from the road and plunged madly into the bushes bordering the way. Carson could just see Willis's head and shoulders above a thick growth of wild vines and at these he aimed steadily and fired. Had he won? he asked himself. There was a smothered report from Willis's revolver, as if it were fired by an inert finger. The mountaineer's head sank out of sight. What did it mean? Carson wondered, and with his weapon still cocked and poised he grimly waited. It was only for an instant, for the frightened horse plunged out into the open again. Willis was still in the saddle, but what was it about him that seemed so queer? He was evidently making an effort to guide his horse, but the hand holding his revolver hung helplessly against his thigh; his left shoulder was sinking. Then Carson caught sight of his face, a frightful, blood-packed mask distorted past recognition, that of a dying man—a horrible, never-to-be-forgotten grimace. The horses bore the antagonists closer together; their eyes met in a direct stare. Willis's body was rocking like a mechanical thing on a pivot.

"You forced me to do it!" Carson Dwight said, his great soul rising to heights of pity and dismay never reached before. "God knows I did not want to shoot you. Dan, I never have had anything against you. I would have avoided this if I could."

The stare of the wounded man flickered. With a moan of pain he bent to the neck of his horse and remained there a moment, and then, dropping his revolver and resting both quivering hands on the pommel of his saddle, he drew himself partially erect. His eyes were rolling upward, his purple lips moved as if to speak, but his vocal organs seemed to have lost their power. Holding to his pommel with his left hand, he raised his right and partially extended it towards Dwight, but he had not the strength to sustain its weight, and with another moan, a frothing at the mouth, Dan Willis toppled from his horse and went to the ground, the animal breaking away in alarm and running down the road.

Quickly dismounting, Carson bent over the dying man. "Dan, were you offering me your hand?" he asked, tenderly. But there was no response. The mountaineer was dead. There he lay, a pint whiskey flask nearly empty of its contents protruding from his shirt.

Carson looked up and about him. The sky had never seemed clearer, the forest never so beautifully lush and green, so full of sylvan recesses and the gladsome songs of birds. Higher and more majestic never had the mountains seemed to tower into God's infinite blue. And yet here at his feet lay the remains of one who had been created in the image of his Maker, as lifeless as the clod from which

he had sprung. All *this*—and Carson's horse nibbling with bitted mouth the short grass which grew about. There were no fires of satisfied revenge at which the spiritually chilled young man could warm himself. Regret steeped in the vat of remorse filled his young soul. Seating himself at the side of the road, he remained there a long time calmly laying his plans. Of course, knowing the law as he knew it, he would give himself up to the sheriff. Then with a start and a shock of horror he thought of his mother. Dr. Stone's warning now loomed up before him as if written in letters of fire. Yes, this—this, of all things, would kill her! Knowing her nature, nothing that could happen to him would be more fatal. Not even his own death by violence would hold such terrors for her sensitive, imaginative temperament, which exaggerated every ill or evil that beset his path. After all, he grimly asked himself, which way did his real duty lie? Obedience to the law he reverenced demanded that he throw himself upon its slow and creaking routine, and yet was there not a higher tribunal? By what right should the legal machinery of his or any other country require the life of a stricken woman that the majesty of its forms might be upheld and the justice or injustice to an outlaw who had persistently hounded him be formally passed upon?

No, he told himself, the right to protect his mother was *his*—it was even more, as he saw it, it was his first duty. And yet if he kept his own counsel, he asked himself, his legal mind now active, what were the chances of escape from accusation? Noticing the target still pinned to the trunk of the tree

with the dead man's pocket-knife, the shots showing on the bark and paper, and the sprawling attitude of the corpse with the wound over the region of the heart, he asked himself, with faintly rising hope, what more natural than to assume that death had resulted from accident? What more reasonable than the theory that on his frightened horse Dan Willis had accidentally directed his shot upon his own body? What better evidence that he was not at himself than the almost empty flask in his shirt? Yes, Carson Dwight decided, it was his duty to wait at least to see further before taking a step which would result in even deeper tragedy. Besides, he knew he was morally guiltless. His conscience was clear; there was consolation in that at all events. But now what must he do? To go on to Springtown by that road was out of the question, for only a mile or so farther on was a store and a few farm-houses, and it would be known there that he had passed the fatal spot. So, remounting, he rode slowly back towards Darley, now earnestly, and even craftily, hoping that he would meet no one. He was successful, for he reached the main road, which was longer, not so well graded, and a more sparsely settled thoroughfare to his destination.

He had lost time, and he now put his horse into a brisk canter and sped onward with a queer blending of emotions. The thought of possibly saving his mother from a terrible shock buoyed him up while the grewsome happening put a weight upon him he had never borne before.

XXXIX

IT was after dark when he finally reached Springtown and rode through the quiet little street to the only hotel in the village kept by a certain Tom Wyman, whom Dwight knew. Dismounting, he turned his tired horse over to a negro porter and went into the room which was used at once as parlor and office. A dog-eared account-book lay open on a table, and here, at the request of the cordial Wyman, a short, portly man with sandy hair and mustache, Carson registered his name.

"You are out electioneering, I know," the proprietor smiled, agreeably, as he rubbed his fat hands together. "Well, you are going to run like a scared dog. I hear your name everywhere. It looked as black as Egyptian darkness for you once, but you are gaining ground. No man ever had a better campaign document than the speech Jabe Parsons' wife made. Gee whiz! it was a stem-winder; it set folks to laughin' at Wiggin, and that was the worst thing that ever happened to him. Jabe Parsons is for you now, though he headed one wing of the mob agin your pet darky. You see, Jabe wants to prove that his wife was right in the way she first felt about the matter, and he's a strong man."

As if in a dream, so far into the background had

even his contest been thrust by the tragedy, Carson heard himself as if from the mouth of another explaining that it was legal business that had brought him thither, and calmly asking the best road from the village to Purdy's farm, whither he intended to go the following morning after breakfast.

A few minutes later the supper bell was rung by a negro, who carried it with deafening clangor through the main hall and round the house, and two or three drummers, of the small-trade class, a village storekeeper, and a stock-drover or two clattered in on the uncarpeted floor to the dining-room, and with more noise drew out their chairs and sat down. It happened that Carson knew none of them, and so he sat silent through the meal. Usually of robust appetite, to-night all inclination to physical nourishment had deserted him. Try as he would to fasten his mind upon more cheerful things, the view of Dan Willis's body stretched upon the ground, the ghastly features struggling in the throes of death, came again and again before his eyes with tenacious persistency. Morbidly, he asked himself if that state of mind would continue always. The disaster really had crept upon him through no deliberate fault of his. In fact, he could trace its very beginning to his determination to turn over a new leaf and make a better man of himself—to that and to a natural inborn pity for a persecuted creature, and yet here was he, his hands stained red, unable by any stoicism or philosophy to rid himself of a gloom as deep as the void of space. Genuine man that he was, he pitied the giant who had fallen before him. His mind, trained to logical reasoning in most matters,

told him that he was more than justified in what he had done; but then, if so, to what was due this strange shock to his whole being—this restless sense of boundless debt to something never met before, the ominous flapping of wings in a new darkness around him?

After supper, to kill time until the hour of retiring, Carson declined the proffered cigar of his host, and to avoid the—to him—empty chatter of the others, now assembled on the little porch, he strolled down the street. Here groups of men sat in front of the stores in the dim light thrown from murky lamps within, but it happened that he was not recognized by any of them though there were several gaunt forms he knew, and he passed on, walking feverishly. On and on he strode till he had covered more than a mile and suddenly came upon a little church surrounded by a graveyard. He leaned upon the rotten fence and looked over at the mounds marked by white marble slabs in some cases, plain, unlettered natural stones in others, and some unmarked by any sort of monument, but having little white palings around them.

Carson Dwight shuddered and turned his face back towards the village as he asked himself if this might be the resting-place of the man he had slain. Life to him had been so bounteous, despite all the trials he had encountered, that to think that he had by his own hand, even under gravest provocation, deprived a human being of its privileges gave him pain akin to nothing he had ever felt before.

Reaching his room in the hotel, which was at the head of the stairs in the front part of the house, his

first impulse was to lock his door—why, he could not have explained. It was not fear; what was it? With a defiant smile he left it unfastened and proceeded to undress himself. As he threw himself on his bed he became conscious of the impulse to say his prayers. What a queer thing! It had been years since he had actually knelt in prayer, and yet tonight he wanted to do so. A strange, hot, rebellious mood came over him a few minutes later as he lay staring at the disk on the sky-blue ceiling cast by the lamp-chimney. He felt like crying out to the infinite powers in tones of demand to lift the weird, stifling pall that was pressing down on him.

The words his father had spoken in a rage when the old gentleman had first seen the wound on his forehead after Pete Warren's rescue now came to him with startling force:

"All this for a trifling negro! Have you lost your senses?"

What, Carson asked himself, would his father say to this deeper step—this headlong plunge into misfortune as the outcome of the cause he had espoused?

Carson could not sleep, and fancying that if his light were out he might do so, he rose and extinguished it and went back to bed. But he was still restless. The hours dragged by. It was after twelve o'clock, when on the still night air came the steady beat of a horse's hoofs in the distance, growing louder and louder, till with a cry of "Woah!" the animal was reined in at the hotel door, and the stentorian voice of the rider called out:

"Hello! hello in thar!"

There was a pause, but no response. The landlord was evidently a sound sleeper.

"Hello! hello!" Again the call rang jarringly through the empty hall below and up the stairway.

Carson sat erect, put his feet on the floor, and stood out in the centre of the room. He told himself that it was an officer of the law in pursuit of him. How silly to have imagined that such a thing could remain hidden! And his mother! Yes, it would kill her! Poor, poor, gentle, frail woman! He had tried to obviate the blow, resorting to deception, to actual flight; he had submerged himself in the mire of criminal secrecy, according to the letter of the law, that he might shield her, and for what purpose? Yes, the blow would kill her. Dr. Stone had plainly said so.

He went to the window and looked out. At the gate below he saw a man on a horse, and heard him muttering impatiently.

"Hello in thar!" The cry was accompanied by an oath. "Are you-uns plumb deaf? What do you keep a tavern fur, anyhow?"

There was a sound in the room below of some one getting out of bed, and then a drowsy voice cried:

"Who's there?" It was the landlord.

"Me, Jim Purvines. Let me in, Tom. I've got to have a bed an' a stall fer my nag. I'm completely fagged out."

"All right, all right. I'll join you in a minute. Where in the thunder have you been, Jim?"

"To the inquest. They made me serve. Samson called a jury right off so they could move the body

home. The dead man's mammy didn't want it to lie thar all night."

"Good Lord! Jury? Dead man? Why, what's happened, Jim?"

"Oh, come off! You don't mean you hain't heard the news?" The rider had dismounted and was leading his horse through the gate to the steps on which the landlord now stood. "Why, Tom, Dan Willis has gone to his last accountin'. The Webb children, out pickin' huckleberries, come across his remains on the Treadwell road a mile t'other side o' Wilks's store. At first it was thought he'd met his death by bein' throwed from his colt, fer somebody seed it loose with saddle an' bridle on, but when we examined the body we found a bullet-hole over the heart."

"Good Lord! Who done it, Jim?"

Carson's heart was in his mouth; his breath was held; there was a pause which seemed without end.

"Done it hisself, Tom. The jury had no difficulty comin' to that decision from ample evidence. He'd tuck his pocket-knife an' stuck up an envelope with his name on it agin a tree, an', half drunk, as we judged from his flask, he was shootin' at it over the head of a young colt that hain't been broke a month. Dan must have had the devil in 'im, an' was determined to train the animal to stand under fire, fer we seed whar the dirt was pawed up powerful all around. We calculated that the colt got to buckin' an' to keep from bein' throwed off Dan turned his gun the wrong way. Anyhow, he's no more."

"Yes, an' I reckon a body ought to respect the dead, good or bad," said the landlord; "but there

won't be a river of tears shed, Jim. That fellow was a living threat to law and order."

"Yes, I have heard that he was the chap that shot Carson Dwight the night he saved that nigger from the mob."

"Sh! He's up-stairs now," The landlord lowered his voice.

"You don't say! Sort o' out of his beat, ain't he?"

"I don't know—on his way to Purdy's. Go on in; I'll attend to your horse and come back and find you a place to bunk."

Carson sank back on his bed. A sense of vast, almost soothing relief was on him. His mother was saved. The verdict that had been rendered would forever bury the facts. Now, he told himself, he could sleep with his mind at rest. And yet—

He heard the new-comer ascend the stairs with heavy, shambling tread and enter the room adjoining his own. Through a crack between the floor and the thin partition he saw a pencil of candle-light and heard the grinding of boot-soles on the floor as the man undressed. Then the light went out, the bed-slats creaked, and all was still.

XL

DWIGHT reached Darley the following evening shortly after dusk, and rode straight through the central portion of the town and past his office. All day long he had debated with himself whether it would be wise to take Garner into his confidence, and at last had decided that it would do no good, and only cause his sympathetic partner to worry needlessly, since Garner nor no one else could point out any better course than the one to which, perforce, he had committed himself. Carson now comprehended his insistent morbidness. It was not fear; it was not a guilty conscience; it was only the galling shackles of unwonted and hateful secrecy, the vague and far-reaching sense of uncertainty, the knowledge of being, before the law (which was no respecter of persons, circumstances, or sentiment), as guilty of murder as any other untried violator of peace and order.

On the way down the street to his home he met Dr. Stone, who was also riding, and reined in.

"My mother—how is she, doctor?" he asked. "I've been away since I saw you yesterday."

"You'll really be surprised when you see her," the old man smiled. "She's tip-top! I never saw such a change for the better in all my experience. She

had old Linda in her room when I was there about noon, and they were laughing and cracking jokes at a great rate. She'll pull through now, my boy. I tried to get her to tell me what had happened, but she threw me off with the joke that she had changed doctors and was taking another fellow's medicine on the sly, and then she and Linda laughed together. I believe the old negro knew what she meant. I'll tell you one thing, Carson, if I wasn't afraid of hurting your pride I'd congratulate you on what happened to that chap Willis. Really, if that thing hadn't taken place you and he would have had trouble. Some think he was getting ready for you when he was shooting at that target."

"Perhaps so, doctor," Carson said, glad that the dusk veiled his face from the old man's sight. "Well, I'll go on."

At the carriage gate at home he found old Lewis standing ready to take his horse.

"Hello!" Carson said, with a joke that was foreign to his mood; "when did Major Warren discharge you?"

"Hain't discharge me yit, young marster," Lewis smiled, in delight, as he opened the gate and reached out for the bridle. "I knowed you'd be along soon, en so I waited fer you. Marse Carson, Linda powerful anxious ter see you. She settin' on yo'-all's veranda-step now; she been axin' is you got back all evenin'. Dar she come now, young marster. I'll put up yo' horse."

"All right, Uncle Lewis," and Dwight, seeing the old woman shambling towards him, went across the lawn and met her.

"Oh, young marster, I been waitin' fer you," she said. "I got some'n' ter ax you, suh."

"What is it?" he asked. "If it is anything I can do I'll be glad to help you."

"I don't like ter bother you, young marster," Linda said, plaintively; "but somehow it don't seem lak anybody know what ter do. I went ter young miss, en she said fer me ter see you—dat you was de onliest one ter decide. Marse Carson, of course you done heard dat man Willis done killed hisse'f, ain't you?"

"Oh yes, Mam' Linda—oh yes!" Dwight said, his voice holding an odd, submerged quality.

"Well, young marster, you see, me'n Lewis thought dat, bein' as dat man was de ringleader, en de only one left on de rampage after my boy, dat, now he's daid, I might sen' ter Chattanoogy fer Pete en let 'im come on home."

"Why, I thought he was doing well up there?" Carson said again, in a tone which to himself sounded as expressionless as if spoken only from the lips.

"Dat so; dat so, too," Linda sighed; "but, Marse Carson, he de onliest child I got en I wants 'im wid me. I wants 'im whar I kin see 'im en try ter 'fluence 'im ter do what's right. In er big place lak Chattanoogy he may git in mo' trouble, en—" She went no further, her voice growing tremulous and finally failing.

"Well, send for him, by all means," Dwight said. "He'll be all right here. We'll find something for him to do."

"En, en—dar won't be no mo' trouble?" Linda faltered.

"None in the world now, mammy," he replied. "The people all over the country are thoroughly satisfied that he's innocent. No one will even appear against him. He is all right now."

Tears welled up in Linda's eyes and she wiped them off on her apron. "Thank God, young marster; one time I thought I never would want ter live another minute, en yit right now—right now I'm de happiest woman in de whole world, en you done it, young marster. You stood up fer er po' old nigger 'oman when de world was turn agin 'er, en God on high know I bless you. I bless you in every prayer I sen' up."

He turned from her as she stood wiping her eyes and went on to his mother's room, finding her, to his delight, sitting up in an easy-chair near the table on which stood a lamp and a book she had been reading.

"Did you see Linda?" Mrs. Dwight asked, as he kissed her tenderly and stood, still with that ever-present alien weight at his heart, stroking her soft cheek. He nodded and smiled.

"And did you tell her—did you decide that Pete could come back?"

He nodded and smiled again. "She seems to think I'm running the country."

"As far as her interests are concerned, you *have* been," the invalid said, proudly. "Oh, Carson, you know somehow it has happened that I never knew Linda so well as some of our own slaves, but since this thing came up I have thoroughly enjoyed having her come to see me. I keep her here hours at a time. Do you know why?"

He shook his head. "Not unless it is because she has such a strong individuality and is so original."

"No, that isn't it—it is simply, my boy, because she worships the very ground you walk on, and I love to hear her express it in the thousands of indirect ways she has. Oh, Carson, I'm simply foolish—*foolish* about you! I have never been able to tell you how I felt about your heroic conduct. I was afraid to. I gloried in it, but your constant danger tied my tongue—I was afraid you'd take more risks. I've got a secret to tell you."

"To tell me?" he said, still stroking her cheek.

"Yes; Dr. Stone, seeing that I was so much better this morning tried to worm it out of me, but I wouldn't tell him the cause. Carson, for a long time I have harbored a gnawing, secret fear. It was with me night and day. I knew it was dragging me down, keeping me from proper sleep and proper nourishment, but I couldn't rid myself of it till this morning."

"What was it, mother?" he asked, unable to see her drift.

"The fear, my boy, that you and that Dan Willis would meet face to face has for a long time been a constant nightmare to me. I had picked up in various ways, sometimes from remarks let fall by your father or one of the servants, more about your differences with that man than you were aware of. I tried to keep you from knowing how I felt, but it was secretly dragging me to my grave."

"And now, mother?" he asked, an almost hopeful light breaking far away on his clouded horizon.

"Oh, it may be an awful sin, for I'm told Willis

had a mother"—Mrs. Dwight sighed—"but when the news came to-day that he had accidentally killed himself I became a new woman. He was the one thing I dreaded above all else, for, Carson, if he had not shot himself you and he would have met and one of you would have fallen. Oh, I'm so happy. I'm going to get well now, my boy. You will see me out on the lawn in a day or two."

His eyes were on the floor at her feet. Why he gave so much of his mental burden to mere utterance he could not have explained, but he said:

"And even if we *had* met, mother, and he had tried to shoot me, and—and I, in self-defence you know, had been forced to kill him—really forced—I suppose even that situation would have—disturbed you?"

"Oh, don't, don't talk of that!" Mrs. Dwight cried. "I don't think it is right to think of unpleasant things when one is happy. God did it, Carson. God did it to save you."

"All right, mother, I was only thinking—"

"Well, think of pleasanter things," Mrs. Dwight interrupted him. "Helen's been over to see me rather oftener of late. We frequently sit and chat together. It makes me feel young again. She is very free with me about herself — that is, about everything except her affair with Mr. Sanders."

"She doesn't talk of that much, then?" he ventured, tentatively.

"She won't talk about it at all," said the invalid; "and that's what seems so queer about it. A woman can see deeper into a woman's heart than a man can, and I've been wondering over Helen. Some-

times I almost think—" Mrs. Dwight seemed lost in thought and unconscious of the fact that she had ceased speaking.

"You were saying, mother," he reminded her, eagerly, "that you almost thought—"

"Why, it seems to me, Carson, that any natural girl ought to be so full of her engagement to the man she is to marry that she would really *love* to talk about it. Really it seems to me that Helen may be questioning her heart in this matter, but she'll end by marrying Mr. Sanders. It looks as if she has pledged herself in some way or other, and she is the very soul of honor."

"Oh yes, she is all that," Dwight said, in an effort at lightness. "Now, good-night, mother."

Much fatigued from his journey and the mental strain upon him, he went up to his room. Throwing off his coat, the night being warm to oppressiveness, he lighted a cigar and sat in the wide-open window. What a strange, tempestuous life was his! How like a mere bauble of soul and flesh was he buffeted between highest heaven and lowest earth! And for what purpose was he created in the vast scheme of endless solar systems?

From the row of negro cabins and cottages below, across the dewy grass and shrubbery, on the flower-perfumed air came sounds of unrèstrained merriment. Some negro in a cottage near Linda's was playing a mouth-organ to the accompaniment of a sweetly twanging guitar. There was a rhythmic clapping of hands, the musical, drumlike thumping of feet on resounding boards, snatches of happy songs, clear, untrammelled, childlike laughter.

They—and naught else—had brought him his burden. That complete justice might be meted out to such as they, he had dipped his hands into the warm blood of his own race, and was an outlaw bearing an honored name, stalking forth, pure of heart, and yet masked and draped with deceit, among his own kind. And for what ultimate good? Alas! he was denied even the solace of a look into futurity. And yet—born in advance of his time, as the Son of God was born ahead of His—there was yet something in him which—while he shrank from the depth and bitterness of *his* cup—lifted him, in his unmated loneliness, in his blindness, to far-off light—high above the material world. There to suffer, there to endure, and yet—there.

XLI

IT was the day following the burial of the body of Dan Willis. Old man Purdy, whom Carson had gone to see, was at Dilk's cross-roads store with a basket of fresh eggs, which he had brought to exchange for their market value in coffee. Several other farmers were seated about the store on nail-kegs and soap-boxes whittling sticks and chewing tobacco, their slow tongues busy with the details of the recent death and interment.

Old Purdy was speaking of how the children had discovered the body, and remarked that it would have been found several hours sooner if Carson Dwight had only taken the shorter road that day to Springtown instead of the longer.

"Why, Dwight come from Darley, didn't he?" asked Dilk, as he wrote down the number of eggs he had counted on a piece of brown paper on the counter and waited before continuing.

"Why, yes," Purdy made answer; "he told me, as we were goin' through the work he had to do at my house, that he had gone to Springtown an' stayed all that night an' then rid on to me."

The store-keeper's hands hovered over the basket for an instant, then they rested on its edge. "Well, I can't make out what under the sun Dwight went

so far out o' his way for. It's fully five mile farther, and the road is so rough and washed out that it's mighty nigh out of use."

"Well, that *does* look kind o' funny, come to think of it," admitted Purdy, as he gazed into the bland faces around him. "I never thought of it before, but it certainly looks odd, to say the least."

"Of course thar may not be a thing *in* it," said Dilk, in a guarded tone, "but it *does* all seem strange, especially after we've heard so much talk about the threats passin' betwixt them very two men. I mean, you see, neighbors, that it sort o' looks providential that—that Dan met with the accident before Dwight an' him come together over here. That's what I mean."

All heads nodded gravely, all minds were busy, each in its own individual way, and stirred by something more exciting than the mere accidental death of Willis or the formality of his burial.

There was a rather prolonged silence broken only by the click of the eggs which Dilk was counting into a new tin dish-pan. When he had finished he weighed out the coffee and emptied it into the white, smoothly ironed poke Purdy's wife had sent along for that purpose. Then he looked straight into Purdy's eyes.

"Did you notice—if thar ain't no harm in axin'—whether Dwight seemed—well, anyways upset or—or bothered while he was at your house?"

"Well, *I* didn't," replied the farmer; "but my wife was in the room while he was doin' the writin' that had to be done, an' I remember now she axed me after he left ef he was a drinkin' man. I told her

no, I didn't think he was *now*, though he used to be sorter wild, an' I wanted to know why she axed me. She said she never had seed anybody's hands shake like his did while he held the pen, an' that he had a quar look about the eyes like he'd lost a power o' sleep."

"Was—was anything said in his presence about Willis's death that you remember of?" the storekeeper pursued, with the skill of a legal cross-examiner, while the listeners stared, their cuds of tobacco compressed between their grinders.

Purdy's face had grown rigid, almost as that of an important witness on the stand in court. "I can't just remember," he said. "There was so much talk about it on all sides that day. Oh yes—now I recall that—well, you see we was all at my house, eager for news, and it struck me, you know, as if Dwight wasn't as anxious to talk as the rest—in fact, it looked like he sorter wanted to change the subject."

"Oh!" The exclamation was breathed simultaneously from several mouths.

"Of course, neighbors," Purdy began, in alarm, "don't understand me for one minute to—" But he broke off, for Dilk had something else to observe.

"Them two men was at dagger's-p'ints, I've heard," he declared. "Friends on both sides was movin' heaven an' earth to keep 'em apart. Now if Dwight *did* take that long, roundabout road from Darley to Springtown, why, they didn't meet. But ef Dwight went the way he always *has* tuck, an' I've seed 'im out this way often enough, why—" Dilk raised his hands and held them poised significantly in mid-air.

"But the coroner's jury found," said Purdy, "that Willis was shootin' at a target he'd stuck up on a tree with his own knife, an' that his young hoss was skittish, an'—"

"All the better proof of bad blood betwixt 'em," burst from a farmer on a nail-keg. "The truth is, some hold now that Willis was out practising so he could wing that particular game. The only thing I see agin what you-uns seem to think is that it's been kept quiet. Dwight is a lawyer an' knows the law, an' he wouldn't cover a thing like that up when all he'd have to do would be to establish proof that it was done in self-defence an' git his walking-papers."

"Thar you are!" Dilk said, in a voice that rang with conviction; "but suppose *one* thing—suppose this. Suppose the provocation wasn't exactly strong enough to quite justify killing. Suppose Dwight, made mad by all he'd heard, drawed an' fired without due warning, and suppose while he was thar in that quiet spot he had time to think it all over and decided that he'd stand a better chance of escape by not bein' known in the matter. A body never can tell. You kin bet your boots if Dwight *did* kill 'im an' hid the fact, he had ample legal reasons fer not wantin' to be mixed up in it."

The seed was sown, and upon soil well suited to rapid germination and growth. By the next day the noxious weed had its head well above the ground, and, like the crab-grass the farmers knew to be so tenaciously prolific, it was spreading rapidly.

XLII

A WEEK went by. Helen Warren had been sitting that warm afternoon in the big bay-window of the parlor. A cooling breeze fanned the old lace curtains inward, bringing the perfume of the flowers from the garden and now and then revealing a wealth of color on the rose-bushes near by. She had just read an appealing letter from Sanders in which he had expressed himself as having been so disturbed by her refusal to assure him positively of what his ultimate fate was to be that he had permitted himself to worry considerably. So greatly concerned, indeed, was he that he had confided in his mother, who, he wrote, had made matters worse by asking him flatly if he was absolutely sure that he was loved in the one and only way a man should be loved by the woman he was hoping to win for his wife.

He was writing all this to Helen in a straightforward, manly way, putting her sharply on her honor, as it were, and she, poor girl, was worried in her turn. Leaving her chair, she went to the piano and seated herself and began to play. She was thus occupied when Ida Tarpley came in suddenly and unannounced, as she felt privileged to do at any time.

"Well, tell me," the visitor smiled, "what's the matter with your playing? Why, you used to have a good, even touch, but as I came up the walk I declare I thought it was some one tuning the piano. You were dropping enough notes to fill a waste-paper basket."

"Oh, I'm not in the mood for it, I presume!" Helen said, checking a sigh.

"I understand." Miss Tarpley gently pushed back Helen's hair and kissed her brow. "You can't deny it; you were thinking about Carson Dwight and all his troubles."

Helen flushed and dropped her glance to her lap, then she rose from the piano and the two girls moved hand in hand to the window. "The truth is," Helen admitted, "that I have been wondering if anything has gone wrong with him—any bad news or indications about his election."

"He can't be worrying about the election," Ida said, confidently. "Mr. Garner comes to see me often and confides in me rather freely, and he says the people are flocking back to Carson in swarms and droves. They understand him now and admire him for the courageous stand he took."

"Well, something is wrong with him," Helen declared, eying her cousin sadly. "Mam' Linda never makes a mistake; she knows him through and through. She went to thank him last night for getting a position for Pete to work regularly at the flouring mill, and she came back really depressed and shaking her head.

"'Suppin certain sho gone wrong wid young marster, honey,' she said. 'He ain't never been lak dis

"'HELEN, I'M AFRIAD SOMETHING VERY, VERY SERIOUS IS HANGING OVER HIM'"

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before; he ain't *hisse'f*, I tell you! He's yaller an' shaky an' look quar out'n de eyes.'"

"Oh!" and Miss Tarpley sank into one of the chairs in the window. "I'm almost sorry you mentioned that, for now *I'll* worry. I've always had his cause at heart, and now — Helen, I'm afraid something very, very serious is hanging over him. I'm not hinting at anything that might come out of his disappointment over your affair with Mr. Sanders, either. It seems to me he accepted that as inevitable and is making the best of it, but it is something else."

"Something else!" Helen repeated. "Oh, Ida, how horribly you talk! Do you mean—is it possible that he was more seriously wounded that night than he has let us know?"

"No, it's not that. I don't know what it is. In fact, Mr. Garner says—"

"What does he say, Ida?" Helen threw into the gap left by her cousin's failure to proceed, and stood staring.

"Well, you know it is easy sometimes to tell when one is not revealing everything, and I felt that way about Mr. Garner when he called night before last. In the first place, though he tried to do it in a casual sort of way, he kept talking of Carson all the time. It was almost as if he had come to see if I would confirm some secret fear of his, for he seemed to get near it several times and then backed out. Once he went further than he intended, for he said, as if it were a slip of the lip, when we were speculating on the possible cause of Carson's depression—he said, 'There is *one* thing, Miss Ida, that I fear, and I fear

it so much that I dare not even mention it to myself.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen, and she leaned on the back of her chair; "what could he have meant?"

"I don't know; Mr. Garner wouldn't explain; in fact, he seemed rather upset by his unintentional remark. He laughed awkwardly and changed the subject, and never alluded to Carson again while he stayed. As he was getting his hat in the hall, I followed him and tried to pin him down to some sort of explanation, and then he made an effort to throw me off. 'Oh,' he said, 'you know Carson is terribly blue about losing Helen, and it has, of course, caused him to care less about his election, but he'll come around in time.' I told Mr. Garner then that I was sure he had meant something else. I was looking straight at him and saw his glance fall, but that was all I got out of him. Something is wrong, Helen—something very, very serious."

"Have you seen Carson lately, Ida?" Helen asked, with rigid lips.

"Not to speak to him; he seems to avoid me, but as I sat in the window of my room yesterday afternoon I saw him go by. He didn't see me, but I saw his face in repose, and oh, cousin, it wrung my heart. He really must have some great secret trouble, and it hurts me to feel that I can't help him bear it. He used to confide in me, but he seems to shun me now, and that, too, in itself, is queer."

"It is not about his mother, either," Helen sighed, "for her health has been improving lately." And as Miss Tarpley was leaving she accompanied her gloomily to the door.

The twilight fell softly, and as Helen sat in the hammock on the veranda her father came in at the gate and up the walk. She rose to greet him with her customary kiss, and taking his arm they began to stroll back and forth along the veranda. She was hoping that he would speak of Carson Dwight, but he didn't, and she was forced to mention him herself, which she did rather stiffly in her effort to make it appear as merely casual.

"Ida was saying this afternoon that Carson is not looking well—or, rather, that he seems to be worried," she faltered out, and then she hung on to the Major's arm and waited.

"Oh, I don't know," the old gentleman said, reflectively. "I went into his office this afternoon to get a blank check, and found him at his desk with a pile of letters from his supporters all over the county. Well, I acknowledge I wondered why he should have so little enthusiasm when the thing is going his way like the woods afire, and his crusty old father fairly chuckling with pride and delight; but what's the use of talking to you! You know if he is blue there is only *one* reason for it."

"Only one reason!" Helen echoed, faintly.

"Yes, how could the poor boy be happy—thoroughly, so I mean—when the whole town can talk of nothing else but the grandeur of your approaching marriage. Mrs. Snodgrass has started the report that your aunt is to give you a ten-thousand-dollar trousseau and that Sanders is to load you down with family jewels. Mrs. Snod says we are going to have such a crowd here at the house that the verandas will be enclosed in canvas and the tables be set

barbecue fashion on the lawn, and that the family servants and all their unlynched descendants are to be brought from the four quarters of the earth to wait on the multitude in the old style. You needn't bother; that's what ails Carson. He's got plenty of pride, and that sort of talk will hurt any man."

But Helen was unconvinced. After supper she sat alone on the veranda, her father being occupied with the evening papers in the library. What could Garner have meant by his remark to Ida? With a heavy heart and her hands tightly clasped in her lap, Helen sat trying to fathom the mystery, for that there was mystery she had no doubt.

She went back to the first days of her return home. When she had arrived her heart—the queer, inconsistent thing which was now so deeply concerned with Carson Dwight's affairs—had been coldly steeled against him. The next salient event of that gladsome period was the ball in her honor of which all else had faded into the background except that memorable talk with Carson and his promise to remove Pete from the temptations of living in town. The boy had gone, then the real trouble had begun. Carson had rescued him from a violent death before her very eyes. That speech of his was never to be forgotten. It had roused her as she had never been roused by human eloquence. With a throb of terror, she heard the report of the pistol fired by Dan Willis, his avowed enemy—Dan Willis upon whom a just Providence had visited—visited—visited—

She sat staring at the ground, her beautiful eyes growing larger, her hands clutching each other like clamps of vitalized steel.

"Oh!" she cried. "No, no! not that—not that!" It was an accident. The coroner and his jury had said so. But how strange! No one had mentioned it, and yet it had happened on the very day Carson had ridden along the fatal road to reach Springtown. She knew the way well. She herself had driven over it twice with Carson, and had heard him say it was the nearest and best road, and that he would *never take any other.*

Ah, yes, *that* was the explanation—*that* was what Garner feared. *That* was the terrible fatality which the shrewd lawyer, knowing its full gravity, had hardly dared mention even to himself. Carson Dwight, her hero, had killed a man!

Helen rose like a mechanical thing, and with dragging feet went up the stairs to her room. Before her open window—the window looking out upon the Dwight lawn and garden—she sat in the still darkness, now praying that Carson might appear as he sometimes did. If she saw him, should she go to him? Yes, for the pain, the cold clutch on her heart of the discovery was like the throes of death. She told herself that she had been the primal cause of this as of all his suffering. In the blind desire to oblige her, he had wrecked his every hope. He had lost all and yet was uncomplaining. Indeed, he was trying to hide his misfortune, bearing it alone, like the man he was.

She heard her father closing the library windows to prepare for bed. His steps rang hollowly as he came out into the hall below and called up to her:

"Daughter, are you asleep?"

A reply hung in her dry throat. She feared to

trust her voice to utterance. She heard the Major mutter, as if to himself, "Well, good-night, daughter," and then his footsteps died out. Again she was alone with her grim discovery.

The town clock had just struck ten when she saw the red coal of a cigar on the Dwight lawn quite near the gate leading into her father's grounds. It was he. She knew it by the fitful flaring of the cigar. Noiselessly she glided down the stairs, softly she turned the big brass key in the massive lock and went out and sped, light of foot, across the dewy grass. As she approached him Dwight was standing with his back to her, his arms folded.

"Carson!" she called, huskily, and he turned with a start and a stare of wonder through the gloom.

"Oh," he said, "it's you," and doffing his hat he came through the gateway and stood by her. "It's time, young lady, that you were asleep, isn't it?"

She saw through his effort at lightness of manner.

"I noticed your cigar and wanted to speak to you," she said, in a voice that sounded tense and even harsh. It rose almost in a squeak and died in her tight throat. Something in his wan face and shifting eyes, noticeable even in the darkness, confirmed her in the conviction that she had divined his secret.

"You wanted to see me," he said; "I've had so many things to think about lately, in this beastly political business, you know, that I'm sadly behind in my social duties."

"I—I've been thinking about you all evening," she said, lamely. "Somehow, I felt as if I simply must see you and talk to you."

"How good of you!" he cried. "I don't deserve

it, though—at such a time, anyway. It is generally conceded that it is a woman's duty, placed as you are, to think of only one thing and one individual. In this case the man is the luckiest one in God's universe. He's well-to-do, has scores of admiring, influential friends, and is to marry the grandest, sweetest woman on earth. If that isn't enough to make a man happy, why—"

"Stop; don't speak that way!" Helen commanded. "I can't stand it. I simply can't stand it, Carson!"

He stared at her inquiringly for a moment, as she stood with her face averted, and then he heaved a big sigh as he gently, almost reverently, touched her sleeve to direct her glance upon himself.

"What is it, Helen?" he said, softly, a wealth of tenderness in his shaking voice. "What's gone wrong? Don't tell me *you* are unhappy. Things have gone crooked with me of late—I—I mean that my father has been displeased, till quite recently at least, and I have not been in the best mood; but I have been sustained by the thought that you, at least, were happy. If I thought you were not, I don't know what I would do. "

"How can I be happy when you—when you—" Her voice dwindled away into nothingness, and she could only face him with all her agony and despair burning in her great, melting eyes.

"When I what, Helen?" he asked, gropingly. "Surely you are not troubled about *me*, now that my political horizon is so bright that my opponent can't look at it without smoked glasses. Oh, I'm all right. Ask Garner—ask your father—ask Braider—ask anybody."

"I was not thinking of your *election*," she found voice to say. "Oh, Carson, *do* have faith in me! I crave it; I long for it; I yearn for it. I want to help you. I want to stand by you and suffer with you. You can trust me. You tried me once—you remember—and I stood the test. Before God, I'll never breathe it to a soul. Oh"—stopping him by raising her despairing hand—"don't try to deceive me because I'm a girl. The uncertainty is killing me. I'll not close my eyes to-night. The truth will be easier borne because I'll be bearing it—*with you.*"

"Oh, Helen, can it be possible that you—" He had spoken impulsively and essayed to check himself, but now, pale as a corpse, he stood before her not knowing what to do or say. He opened his mouth as if to speak, and then with a helpless shrug of his shoulders he lapsed into silence, a droop of utter despondency upon him. She was now sure she was right, and a shaft she had never met before entered her heart and remained there—remained there to strengthen her, good woman that she was, as such things have strengthened women of all periods. She laid her firm hand upon his arm in a pressure meant to comfort him, and with the purity of a sorrowing angel she said:

"I know the truth, dear Carson, and if you don't show me a way to get you out from under it—you who did it all for my sake—if you don't I shall die. I can't stand it."

He stood convicted before her. With bowed head he remained silent for a moment, then he said, almost with a groan: "To think, on top of it all, that you must know—*you!* I was bearing it all right, but

now you—you poor, gentle, delicate girl—you have to be dragged into this as you have been dragged into every miserable thing that ever happened to me. It began with your brother's death—I helped stain that memory for you—now this—this unspeakable thing!"

"You did it wholly in self-defence," she said. "You *had* to do it. He forced it on you."

"Yes, yes—he or fate, the imps of Satan or the elemental passion born in me. Flight, open flight lay before me, but that would have been the death of self-respect—so it came about."

"And you kept it on account of your mother?" she went on, insistently, her agonized face close to his.

"Yes, of course. It would kill her, Helen, and I would be doing it deliberately, for I know what the consequences would be. I must be my own tribunal. I have no right to take still another life that legal curiosity may be gratified. But till I am proven innocent I am a murderer — that's what hurts. I am offering myself to my fellow-men as a maker of laws, and yet am deliberately defying those made by my predecessors."

"Your mother must never know," Helen said, firmly. "No one shall but you and I, Carson. We'll bear it together." She took his hand and held it tightly for a moment, then pressing it tenderly against her cold cheek, she lowered her head and left him—left him there under the vague starlight, the soulful fragrance of her soothing personality upon him, causing him to forget his peril, his grief, and his far-reaching sorrow, and to draw close to his aching breast her heavenly sympathy and undying fidelity.

XLIII

ONE morning, a week later, Pole Baker slouched down the street from the wagon-yard, and, peering into the law-office of Garner & Dwight, he stood undecided on the deserted street, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his baggy trousers. He took another surreptitious look. Garner was at his desk, his great brow wrinkled as with concentrated thought, his coarse hair awry, his coat off and shirt-sleeves rolled up to his elbows, his fingers stained with ink. Glancing up at this moment, he caught the farmer's eye and nodded:

"Hello!" he said, cordially; "come in. How's our young colt running out your way?"

"Like a shot out of a straight-barrelled gun," Baker retorted. "He's the most popular man in the county. He had a slow start, in all that nigger mess, but he's all right now."

"So you think he'll be elected?" Garner said, as Pole sat down in a chair near his desk and began to twirl his long, gnarled fingers.

"Well, I didn't say *that*, exactly," the farmer answered.

"But you said—" In his perplexity the lawyer could only stare.

"I reckon thar are lots of things in this life that

kin keep fellows out of offices besides the men runnin' agin 'em," Baker said, significantly.

The eyes of the two men met in a long, steady stare; each was trying to read the other. But Garner was too shrewd a lawyer to be pumped even by a trusted friend, and he simply leaned back and took up his pen. "Oh yes, of course," he observed, "a good many slips betwixt the cup and the lip."

Silence fell between the two men. Baker broke it suddenly and with his customary frankness. "Look here, Bill Garner," he said. "That young feller's yore partner an' friend, but I've got his interests at heart myself, an' it don't do no harm sometimes fer two men to talk over what concerns a friend to both. I come in town to talk to *somebody*, an' it looks like you are the man."

"Oh, that's it," Garner said. "Well, out with it, Baker."

Pole thrust his right hand into his pocket and took out a splinter of soft pine and his knife. Then, with the toe of his heavy shoe, he drew a wooden, sawdust-filled cuspidor towards him and over it he prepared to whittle.

"I want to talk to you about Carson," he said. "It ain't none o' my business, Bill, but I believe he's in great big trouble."

"You do, eh?" and Garner seemed to throw caution to the winds as he leaned forward, his great, facile mouth open. "Well, Pole?"

"Gossip—talk under cover from one mouth to another," the mountaineer drawled out, "is the most dangerous thing, next to a bucket o' powder in a cook-stove that you are goin' to bake in, of anything

I know of. Gossip has got hold of Dwight, Bill, an' it's tangled itself all about him. Ef some'n' ain't done to choke it off it will git him down as shore as a blacksnake kin swallow a toad after he's kivered it with slime."

"You mean—" But Garner seemed to think better of his inclination towards subterfuge and broke off.

"I mean about the way Dan Willis met his death," Pole said, to the point. "I'm no fool an' you ain't, at least you wouldn't be ef you was paid by some client to git at the facts. Folks are ready to swear Carson was seed the day that thing happened on that road inside of a mile o' whar Willis was found. You know what time Carson left here that day; it was sometime after dinner, an' the hotel man at Springtown says he got thar an' registered after dark. He says, too, that Carson looked nervous an' upset an' seemed more anxious to avoid folks than the general run of vote-hunters. Then — then, oh, well, what's the use o' beatin' about the bush? You know an' I know that Carson hain't been actin' like himself since then. It's all we can do to git 'im interested in his own popularity, an' that shows some'n' is wrong—dead wrong. An' it looks to me like it is a matter that ought to be attended to. Killin' a man is serious enough in the eyes of the law without covering it up till it's jerked out of you by the State solicitor."

"So you think the two men met?" Garner said, now quite as if he were inquiring into the legal status of any ordinary case.

"That's my judgment," answered Pole. "And if

I'm right, then it seems to me that Carson an' his friends ought to take action before—"

"Before what?" Garner prompted, almost eagerly.

"Before the grand jury takes it up, as you know they will have to with all this commotion goin' the rounds."

"Yes, Carson ought to act—concerned in it or not," said Garner. "If something isn't done right away, it might be sprung on him on the very eve of his election and actually ruin him."

"I'm worried, an' I don't deny it," said the mountaineer. "You see, Bill, Carson's a lawyer, and he knows whether he had a good case of self-defence or not, an' shirking investigation this way looks powerful like—"

"Like he was himself the—aggressor," interpolated Garner, with a frown.

"Yes, like that," said Baker. "Of course we know Willis was houndin' the boy and making threats, but Carson's hot-headed, as hot-headed as they make 'em, an' maybe he flared up at the first sight of Willis an' blazed away at 'im. I don't see no other reason for him lyin' so low about it."

"I'm glad you came to me," Garner said. "I'll admit I've been fearing the thing, Pole. It will be a delicate matter to broach, but I'm going to talk to him about it. As you say, the longer it remains like it is the more serious it becomes. Good Lord! if he *did* kill Willis—if he *did* kill him, it would take sharp work to clear him of the charge of murder after the silly way he has acted about it. Why, dang it, it's almost an admission of guilt!"

Baker had barely left the office when Carson came

in, nodded to his partner, and sat down at his desk and began in an absent-minded way to cut open some letters that were waiting for him. Unobserved Garner watched him from behind the worn book he was holding up to his face. Hardened lawyer that he was, Garner's heart melted with pity as he noted the dark splotches under the young man's eyes, the pathetic droop of his shoulders, the evidences in every facial line of the grim inward struggle that was going on in the brave, supersensitive soul. Garner put down his book and went into the little consultation-room in the rear and stood at the window which looked out upon a small patch of corn in an adjoining lot.

"He did it!" he said, grimly. "Yes, he did it. Poor chap!"

The task before him was the hardest Garner had ever faced. He could have discussed, to the finest points of detail, such a case for a client, but Carson —the strange, winning personality over which he had marvelled so often—was different. He was the most courageous, the most self-sacrificing, the most keenly suffering human being Garner had ever known, and the most sensitively honorable. How was it possible, even indirectly, to allude to so grave a charge against such a man? And yet, Garner reflected, pessimistically, the best of men sometimes reach a point at which their high moral and spiritual tension, under one crucial test or another, breaks. Why should it not be so in Carson Dwight's case.

Garner went back to his desk, sat down, and turned his revolving-chair till he faced Carson's profile. "Look here, old chap," he said. "I've got some-

thing of a very unpleasant nature to say to you, and it's a pretty hard thing to do, considering my keen regard for you.

Dwight glanced up from the letter he held before him. He read Garner's face in a steady stare for a moment, and then said, with a sigh, as he laid the letter down:

"I see you've heard it. Well, I knew it would get out. I've seen it coming for several days."

"I began to guess it a week or so back," Garner went on, outwardly calm; "but this morning in talking to Pole Baker I became convinced of it. It is a grim sort of thing, my boy, but you must not despair. You've surmounted more obstacles than any young fellow I know, and I believe you will eventually come through this. Though you must acknowledge that it would have been far wiser to have given yourself up at once."

"I couldn't do it," Carson responded, gloomily. "I thought of it. I started on my way to Braider, really, but finally decided that it wouldn't do."

"Good God! was it as bad as that?" Garner exclaimed. "I've been hoping against hope that you could—"

"It couldn't be worse." Carson lowered his head till it rested on his hand. His face went out of Garner's view. "It's going to kill her, Garner. She can't stand it. Dr. Stone told me that another shock would kill her."

"You mean—my Lord! you mean your *mother?* You—you"—Garner leaned forward, his face working, his eyes gleaming—"you mean that you did not

report it because of her condition? Great God! why didn't I think of that?"

"Why, certainly." Carson looked round. "Did you think it was because—"

"I thought it was because you had—had killed him in—well, in a manner you feared would not be adjudged wholly justifiable. I never dreamed of the *real* reason. I see it all now," and Garner rose from his chair and with his lips twitching he laid his hand on Dwight's back. "I understand perfectly, and I admire you more than I can say. Now, tell me all about it."

For an hour the two friends sat talking together. Calmly Carson went into detail as to the happening, and when he had finished Garner said:

"You've got a good case, but you can easily see that it is grievously hampered by your concealment of the facts so long. To make a jury see exactly how you felt about your mother's reception of the thing may be hard, for the average man is not by nature quite so finely strung as that, but we must *make* them see it. Dr. Stone's testimony as to his advice to you will help. But, by all means, we must make the advance ourselves as soon as possible—before a charge is brought against you by the grand jury."

"But"—and Dwight groaned aloud—"my mother simply cannot go through it, Garner. I know her. It will kill her."

"She simply must bear it," Garner said, gloomily. "We must find a way to brace her up to the ordeal. I have it. All my hopes are based on our making such a clear statement before Squire Felton, with the testimony of several witnesses as to Willis's threats

against you, that he will throw it out of court. I can see the squire to-day and have a hearing set for to-morrow. We'll make quick work of it. I'll also see your father and—"

"My father!" Carson exclaimed, despondently.

"Yes, I'll see him and explain the whole thing. I think I can get him to keep the matter from reaching your mother till after the hearing. She is still confined to her room, and surely your father can manage that part of it."

"Yes," Carson replied, gloomily; "and he will do all he can, though it's going to be a terrible blow to him. But—if—if the justice court should bind me over, and I should have to go to jail to await trial, then my mother—"

"Don't think about her now!" Garner said, testily. "Let's work for a prompt dismissal and not look on the dark side till we have to. I'll run down and talk to your father at once, before the rumor reaches him and drives him crazy. I tell you it's in the very air; I've felt it for several days."

XLIV

IN his office in one corner of his great grain and cotton warehouse, at a dusty, littered desk before a murky, cobweb-bed window, Garner found old Dwight, his lap full of telegraphic reports, his head submerged in a morning paper containing the market and crop news in general. Outside of the thin-walled office heavy iron trucks, in the grasp of brawny black men, rattled and rumbled over the heavy floor and across weighty skids into open cars in the rear. There was the creaking sound of the big hand elevators engaged in hoisting and lowering bales, barrels, bags, and casks, the mellow sing-song of the light-hearted negroes as they toiled, blissfully ignorant of the profound gloom which had fallen on the defender of their rights.

"I came to see you on an imporant matter concerning Carson," Garner began, as he leaned over the old man's desk.

Dwight lowered his paper, shrugged his shoulders, and sniffed.

"Campaign funds, I reckon," he said. "Well, I've been looking for some such demand. In fact, I've been astonished that you fellows haven't been after me sooner. I'll do anything but buy whiskey to give away. I'm against that custom."

"It wasn't *that*," said Garner, who, usually plain-spoken, shrank from beating about the bush even in so delicate a matter. "The truth is, Carson is in a little trouble, Mr. Dwight."

"Trouble?" the merchant said, bluntly. "Will you kindly show me when he's ever been out of it? Since the day he was born it's been scrape after scrape. By all possessed, Billy, when he wasn't a year old I had to spend fifty dollars to encase all the chimneys in with iron grating to keep him from crawling into the fire. He's walked or stumbled into every fire that was made since then. When he was only twelve a man out at the farm fell in a well and nothing would do Carson but that he must go down after him. He did it, fastened the only available rope about the man and sent him to the top, and when they lowered it to Carson he was so nearly drowned that he could hardly sit in the loop. If I had a list of the scrapes that boy went through at home and at college I'd sell it to some blood-and-thunder novel writer. It would make his fortune. Well, what is it now?"

"Carson is in very serious trouble I'm afraid, Mr. Dwight," Garner said, as he took a chair and sat down. "You will have to prepare yourself for a pretty sharp shock. He couldn't help it. It was pushed on him to such an extent that there was no other way out of it and retain his self-respect. Mr. Dwight, you, of course, heard of Dan Willis's death?"

"Yes, and thought that now that he was under the sod Carson would surely—"

"The death was not an accident, Mr. Dwight,"

Garner interrupted, and his eyes rested steadily on the old man's face.

"You mean that Willis killed himself—that he—"

"I mean that he *forced* Carson to kill him, Mr. Dwight."

The old merchant's face was working as if in the throes of death; he leaned forward, his eyes wide in growing horror.

"Don't, don't say that, Billy; take it back!" he gasped. "Anything but that—anything else under God's shining sun."

"You must try to be calm," Garner said, gently. "It can't be helped. After all, the poor boy was forced to do it to save his life."

Old Dwight lowered his face to his hands and groaned. The negro at the head of the gang of truckmen approached and leaned in the doorway. He had come to ask some directions about the work, but with widening eyes he stood staring. Garner peremptorily waved him away, and, rising, he laid his hand on Dwight's shoulder.

"Don't take it so hard!" he said, soothingly. "Remember, there is a lot to do, and that's what I came to see you about."

Old Dwight raised his blearing eyes, which, in his pallid face now looked bloodshot, and stammered out:

"What is there to do? What does it mean? How was it kept till now? Was he trying to hide it?"

"Yes"—Garner nodded—"the poor boy has been bearing it in secret. He was afraid the news of it would seriously injure his mother."

"And it will!" Dwight groaned. "She will never

bear it in the world. She is as frail as a flower. His conduct has brought her within a hair's-breadth of the grave more than once, and nothing under high heaven could save her from this. It's awful, awful!"

"I know it's bad, but we've got to save him, Mr. Dwight. You can't have your own son—"

"Have him *what?*" Dwight rose, swaying from side to side, and stood facing the lawyer.

"Well, you can't have him sent to jail for murder; you can't have him—found guilty and publicly executed. The law is a ticklish business. Absolutely innocent men have been hanged time after time. I tell you this concealment of the thing, and Carson's hot fury at Willis and the remarks he has made here and there about him—the fact that he was armed—that there were no witnesses to the duel—that he allowed the erroneous verdict of the coroner's jury to go on record—all these things, with a scoundrel like Wiggin in the background at deadly work to thwart us and pull Carson out of his track, are very, very serious. It is the most serious job I ever tackled in the courts, but I'm going to put it through or, as God is my judge, Mr. Dwight, I'll throw up the law."

Tears were now flowing freely from the old merchant's eyes and, unhindered, dripped from his face to the ground. Taking Garner's hand he grasped it firmly, and as he wrung it he sobbed:

"Save my boy, Billy, and I'll never let you want for means as long as you live. He's all I've got, and I'm prouder of him than I ever let folks know. I've made a lot of fuss over some things he's done, but through it all I was proud of him, proud of him

because he saw deeper into right than I did. Even this nigger question—I talked against that a lot, because I thought it would pull him down, but when I heard how he got you all together in Blackburn's store that night and persuaded you to save old Linda's boy—when I learned of that and heard the old woman's cries of joy, and saw the far-reaching effects of what Carson was standing for, I was so proud and thankful that I sneaked off to my room and cried—cried like a child; and now upon it all, as his reward, comes this thing. Oh, Billy, save him! Don't crush the poor boy's spirit. I've always wanted to aid you in some substantial way for your interest in him, and I'm going to do it this time."

"I hope we can squash the thing in justice court in the morning, Mr. Dwight," Garner said, confidently. "The chief thing is for you to keep it all from your wife until then, anyway. I can't do a thing with Carson till his mind is at ease over her. He worships the ground she walks on, Mr. Dwight, and if it hadn't been for that he would have been out of this trouble long ago, for I'm sure a plain statement of the matter immediately after it happened would have cleared him without any trouble. In his desire to spare his mother he has complicated the case, that's all."

"Oh, I can keep it from his mother that long easy enough," said Dwight. "I'll go home now and see to it. Pull my boy through this, Billy. If you have to draw on me for every cent I've got, pull him through. I'm going to treat him different in the future. If he can get out of this I believe he will be elected and make a great man."

An hour later Garner hurried back to the office.

"Everything is in fine shape!" he chuckled, as he threw off his coat and fell to work at his desk. "Squire Felton has fixed the hearing for to-morrow morning at eleven and Pole Baker has gone on the fastest horse in the livery-stable to secure witnesses for our side. He says he can find them galore in the mountains, and your father is as solid as a stone wall. He fell all in a tumble at first, but braced up, said some beautiful things about you, and went home to see that your mother's ears are closed.

"I saw the sheriff, too. What do you think? When I told him the facts, and said that you were ready to give yourself up, he almost cried. Braider's a trump. He said that the law gave him the right to let you go on your own recognizance, and that before he'd arrest you and put you in a common jail he'd have his arms and legs cut off. He said, knowing your heart as he knew it, he'd let you go all the way to Canada without stopping you, and that if you were bound over on this charge he'd throw up his job rather than arrest you. He told me he'd been looking for it—that he got wind of it two days ago, and would have been in to see you about it if he hadn't been afraid you'd misunderstand his coming at such a time. He put a flea in my ear, too. He said we must beware of Wiggin. He has an idea that Wiggin has been on to this for sometime and may have a dangerous dagger up his sleeve. The district-attorney is out of town to-day but will be back to-night. He's as straight as a die and will act fair. I will see him the first thing in the morning. Now, you brace up. Leave everything to me. You

are as good a lawyer as I am, but you are too nervous and worried about your mother to act on your best judgment."

At this juncture the colored gardener from Dwight's came in with a note directed to Garner. Garner opened it and read it while Carson stood looking on. It ran:

"DEAR BILLY,—Everything is all right at this end, and will remain so, at least till after the hearing to-morrow. I enclose my check for ten thousand dollars as a retaining fee. I always intended to give you a little start, and I hope this will help you materially. Save my boy. Save him, Billy. For God's sake pull him through; don't let this thing crush his spirit. He's got a great and a useful future before him if only we can pull him through this."

Carson read the note through a blur and turned away. He was standing alone in the dreary little consultation-room a few minutes later, when Garner came to him, old Dwight's check fluttering in his hands.

"Your dad's the right sort," he said, his eyes gleaming with the infant fires of avarice. "One only has to know how to understand him. The size of this check is out of all reason, but if I can do what he wishes to-morrow, I'll not only accept it, but I'll put it to a glorious use. Carson, there is a young woman in this town whom I'll ask to marry me, and I'll buy a home with this to start life on."

"Ida Tarpley?" said Carson.

"She's the one," Garner said, with a bare touch of rising color. "I think she would take me, from a little remark she dropped, and it was through you that I found her."

"Through me?" Dwight said.

"Yes, it was in talking of your ups and downs that I first saw into her wonderfully sweet and sympathetic nature. Carson, if you get your walking-papers in the morning, I won't wait ten minutes before I pop the question. The lack of means was the only thing that kept me from proposing the last time I saw her."

XLV

THE next morning when Garner reached the office, he found Carson surrounded by "the gang," Blackburn was just leaving, his mild eyes fixed gloomily on the sidewalk, and Wade Tingle, Keith Gordon, and Bob Smith sat about the office with long-drawn, stoical faces.

"I was just telling Carson that it will be a walk-over in court this morning," Wade was saying, comfortingly, as Garner sat down at his desk, his great brow clouded. "Don't you think so, Garner?"

"Well, I'll tell you *one* thing, boys," Garner answered, irritably, "it's too important a matter to make light over, and I want you fellows to clear out so we can get to work. I've got to talk to Carson, and I can't do it with so many here. I'm not accustomed to thinking with a crowd around."

"You bet we'll skedaddle, then, old man," said Keith; "but we'll be at the—the hearing."

When they had gone droopingly out, Carson came from the window at which he had been standing and looked Garner over, noting with surprise that the lower parts of the legs of his partner's trousers were dusty and his boots unpolished. The shirt Garner wore had sleeves that were too long for his arms, and a pair of soiled cuffs covered more than half of

the small hands. His standing collar had become crumpled, and his ever-present black silk necktie, with its unshapely bow and brown, frayed edges, had slipped out of place. His hair was awry, his whole manner nervous and excitable.

"Keith says you didn't sleep at the den last night," Dwight said, tentatively. "Did you go out to your father's?"

Garner seemed to hesitate for an instant, then he crossed his dusty legs and began to draw upon and tie more firmly the loose strings of his worn and cracked patent-leather shoes.

"Look here, Carson," he said, when he had fumblingly tied the last knot, "you are too strong and brave a man to be treated in the wishy-washy way a woman's treated. Besides, you'll have to know the truth sooner or later, anyway, and you may as well be prepared for it."

"Something gone wrong?" Dwight asked, calmly.

"Worse than I dreamed was possible," Garner said. "I thought we'd have comparatively smooth sailing, but — well, it's your danged luck! Pole Baker come in this morning about two o'clock. I'd taken a room at the hotel to get away from those chattering boys so I could think. I couldn't sleep, and was trying to get myself straight with a dime novel that wouldn't hold my attention, when Pole came and found me. Carson, that rascal Wiggin is the blackest devil that ever walked the earth in human shape."

"He's been at work," said Carson, calmly. "I see."

"You'd think so," said Garner. "Pole says wher-

ever he went, expecting to lay hands on good witnesses who had heard Willis make threats, he found that Wiggin had got there first and put up a tale that closed their mouths like clams."

"I see," said Dwight. "He frightened them off."

"I should think he did. He put them on their guard, telling them, without hinting at any trouble of yours, that if they had a call to court, of any sort whatsoever, to get out of it, as it would only be a trick on our part to implicate them in the lynching business."

"So we have no witnesses," said Dwight.

"Not even a photograph of one!" replied Garner, bitterly. "I sent Pole right out again, tired as he was, in another direction. He had a faint idea that he might persuade Willis's mother to testify, though I told him he was on a wild-goose chase, for not one mother in ten thousand would turn over a hand to aid a man who — a man under just such circumstances. Then I got a horse—"

"At that time of night?" Carson cried.

"What was the difference? I couldn't sleep, anyway, and the cool night air made me feel better, but I failed. The men I saw admitted that they had heard Dan talk some, but they couldn't recall any absolute threats. When I got back to town it was eight o'clock. I ate a snack at the restaurant and then hurried off to see the district-attorney. Mayhew is a good man, Carson, and a fair man. I think he is the most honest and conscientious solicitor we've ever had. But right there I saw the track of your guardian angel. As early as it was, Wiggin had been there before me. Mayhew wouldn't ad-

mit that he had, but I knew it from his reserved manner. Why, I expected to see the solicitor take the whole thing lightly, you know, considering your standing at the bar and your family name, but I found him—well, entirely too serious about it. He really talked as if it were the gravest thing that had ever happened. I saw that he was badly prejudiced, and I tried to disabuse his mind of some hidden impressions, but he wouldn't talk much. All at once, however, he looked me in the face and asked me how on earth any sensible man, familiar with the law, could keep a thing like that concealed as long as you did. I told him, in as plausible and direct a way as I could, how you felt in regard to your mother's condition. He listened attentively, then he shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Why, Garner, Dr. Stone told my wife the other day that Mrs. Dwight was improving rapidly. Surely she wasn't as bad off as all that.' My Lord! I was set back so badly that I hardly knew what to say. He went on then to tell me that folks through the country had been saying that towns-people always managed to avoid the law by some hook or crook, or influence, or money, and that he was not going to subject himself to public criticism even in the case of a man as popular as you are."

"That was Wiggin's work!" Carson said, his lips pressed tightly together as he turned back to the window.

"Yes, that's his method. He's the trickiest scamp unhung. Of course, he can't hope to see you actually convicted of this thing, but he does evidently think he can have you bound over to trial at the next term

of court, and beat you at the polls in the mean time. He thinks with his negro incendiary speeches to rouse the lowest element, and the charges that you've murdered one of your own race to inflame the prejudices of others, that he can snow you under good and deep. But we've got to make the best of it. There is no shirking or postponing of this hearing to-day. Even if the very—the very worst comes," Garner finished, slowly, as if shrinking from the words he was uttering, "we can give any bonds the court may demand."

"But"—and Dwight turned from the window and stood before his friend—"what if they refuse to take bonds at all and I have to go to jail?"

"What do you want to cross a bridge like that for?" Garner demanded, plainly angered by the sheer possibility in question.

Dwight leaned over Garner and put his hand on the dusty shoulder. "*That* would kill my mother, old man!"

"Do you think so, Carson?" Garner was deeply moved.

"I know it, Garner, and her blood would be on my head."

"Well, we must *win!*" Garner said, and a look of firm determination came into his eyes; "that is all there is about it. We must win. Eternal truth and justice are on our side. We must win."

XLVI

THE big, square court-room was filled to overflowing when at the last moment Carson and Garner arrived. Just inside the door they found old Dwight standing, his battered silk hat in his hand, and with an air of unwonted humility upon him, patiently awaiting their coming.

"Is everything all right?" he anxiously whispered to Garner, as he reached out and caught his son's hand and held on to it.

"Yes, all right, Mr. Dwight," Garner replied; "and is—is your wife—"

"Yes, we are safe on that score," the old man said, encouragingly, to Carson. "I only slipped away for a minute. I won't wait here, but will hurry back and stand guard. God bless you, my boy."

When Dwight had turned towards the door and was moving away, Carson glanced over the crowded room. All eyes were fixed, it seemed to him, anxiously and sympathetically on his face. As he passed through the central aisle to reach the railed-in enclosure where, at his elevated desk, the magistrate sat, gravely consulting with the State solicitor, Carson's mind was gloomily active with the numerous instances in which, to his knowledge, innocent men had been convicted by the complication of

circumstantial evidence, in a chair which Braider was solicitously placing near that of Garner, the young man's glance again swept the big room. On the last row of benches sat Linda, Uncle Lewis, and Pete in the company of other negro friends of his. Their fixed and awed facial expressions added to his gloom. Near the railing sat "the gang"—Gordon, Tingle, and Bob Smith — their faces long-drawn. Behind them sat Helen and her father, with Ida Tarpley. Catching Helen's anxious glance, Carson tried to smile lightly as he responded to her bow, but there was something in his act which seemed to him to be empty pretence and rather unworthy of one in his position. Guilty or innocent in the eyes of the law, he told himself he was there to rid his character of the gravest charge that could be made against a human being, and from the indications, as seen by the shrewd Garner, he was not likely to leave the room a free man. He shuddered as he grimly pictured Braider—the feeling, sympathetic Braider—coming to him there before all those eyes and formally placing him under arrest at the order of the court. He sank to the lowest ebb of despair as he pictured his mother's hearing of the news. Almost in a daze Carson sat dumb and blind to the formal proceedings. Like a child, he felt a soothing comfort in the knowledge that he was leaning on such a skilled friend as that of the hardened young lawyer at his side, and yet for the first time in his life he was pitying himself. Things had really gone hard with him. He had tried his best to do the right thing of late, but fate had at last overpowered him. He was losing faith in the impulses which had

led him, blind under the blaze of youthful enthusiasm, to that seat here under the cold, accusing eye of the law.

He was drawn out of his lethargy by the clear, ringing, confident voice of the solicitor. It was a strong, an utterly heartless speech, "the gang" thought. Duty to the State and public protection was its key-note. Personally, Mayhew had nothing but the kindliest feeling and strongest admiration for the defendant. He belonged to one of the best and oldest families in the South, and was a man of undaunted courage and remarkable brains. But with all that, Mayhew believed, as he tugged at his heavy mustache and stared with confident eyes at the magistrate, he could show that lurking under the creditable and refined exterior of the defendant was a keenly vindictive nature—a nature that was maddened beyond forbearance by opposition. The solicitor promised to show by competent witnesses, when the matter was brought to trial, that Carson Dwight believed — mark the word *believed*— without an iota of proof, that Dan Willis had fired upon him in the mob that was attempting to lynch Pete Warren. Believing this, your honor, I say, with no sort of proof, I think the State will have no trouble in establishing the fact that Dwight had sufficient *motive* for what was done, and that he deliberately and with aforethought went armed with no other intent than to kill Willis. Furthermore, Mayhew could show, he declared, that Dwight had carefully concealed the deed, letting it go out to the world that the finding of the coroner's jury was correct, and making no statement to the contrary till

he was driven to it by the encroachments of verifiable rumor and the certainty of adverse action by the grand jury. That being the status of the case, the solicitor could only urge upon the court its duty to hold Carson Dwight on the charge of murder in the first degree.

Deep in his slough of depression, Dwight, looking over the breathless audience, noticed the serious faces he knew and loved. Helen was deathly pale, and her father sat with bowed head, fingering his gold-headed ebony cane. Keith Gordon's face was as full of reproach for what the solicitor had said as that of a grief-stricken woman. Wade Tingle sat flushed with rebellious anger, and Bob Smith, not grasping the full import of the high-sounding words, stared from under his neatly plastered hair like a wondering child at a funeral. It was Mam' Linda's almost savage glare that more firmly fixed Carson's wandering glance. She sat there, her visage full of half-savage passion, her large lip hanging low and quivering, her breast heaving, her eyes gleaming.

Carson had not the heart to follow Garner's weak and inadequate plea as the lawyer stood, his small hands clutched and bloodless behind him. He had not been able, he said, to reach the witnesses he had expected to produce, who would swear that Dan Willis, time after time, had pursued the defendant and made threats against his life, but he felt that a calm statement of Carson Dwight's would be believed, and that—

Here there was a commotion in the room. The bailiff at the door was talking loudly to some one. The magistrate rapped vigorously for order, and in

the pause that ensued Pole Baker came striding down the aisle, leading a little woman wearing a black cotton sun-bonnet and dress of the same material. Leaving her standing, Baker approached Garner and whispered in his ear. Then, with a suddenly kindling face, the lawyer turned and whispered to the woman. A moment later he drew himself up to his full height and said, in a clear, confident voice that reached all parts of the room:

"Your honor, I have a witness here that I want to have sworn."

The district-attorney stood up and stared curiously at the woman. "If I'm not mistaken that's Dan Willis's mother," he said, with a smile. "She is a witness I'm looking for myself."

"Well, you are welcome to what she'll testify," Garner dryly retorted.

A moment later the little woman was on the stand, holding her bonnet in her hand, her small, wizened face as colorless as parchment, her black hair brushed as smoothly as patent leather down over her brow and tied in a small, tight knot behind her head.

"Now, Mrs. Willis," Garner went on, casting a significant glance at Carson, who was gazing at him in growing wonder, "just tell the court in your own way what happened at your house the day your son met his death."

The room was very still when she began in a low, quivering voice which, gradually steadied itself as she continued.

"Well," she said, "Mr. Wiggin come to the fence while we-all was eatin' our breakfast, an' called Danny out an' they had a talk near the cow-lot.

I don't know what was said, but I was sorry they got together for Mr. Wiggin always upset Danny an' started 'im to drinkin' and rantin' agin Mr. Dwight here in town." She paused a moment, and then Garner, leaning easily on the back of his chair, said, encouragingly:

"All right, Mrs. Willis, you are doing very well. Now, just go ahead and tell the court all that took place to the best of your recollection."

"Well, thar wasn't much to recollect that happened right thar *at home*," the witness went on, plaintively; "of course, the shootin' tuck place about a mile from thar on the—"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Willis," Garner interrupted. "You are getting the cart before the horse. I want you to tell his honor how your son acted when he came into the house after his talk with Mr. Wiggin."

"Why, when Danny fust come in, Mr. Garner, he went to the bureau drawyer and tuck out his revolver an' loaded it thar before us, cussin' at every breath agin Mr. Dwight. I tried to calm 'im down, an' so did my brother George, but he was as nigh crazy as I ever saw any human bein' in my life. He said he was goin' straight to Darley an' kill Carson Dwight, if he had to go to his daddy's house an' drag 'im out of his bed. He said he'd tried it once an' slipped up, but that if he missed again he'd kill hisse'f in disgust."

"I see, I see," Garner said, in the pause that ensued. He stroked his smooth chin with his tapering fingers and opened and shut his mouth, and he kept his eyes on the ceiling as if the witness had made the most ordinary sort of statement. He leaned

again on the back of his chair, and then lowering his glance to the face of the witness, he asked:

"Did you gather from Dan's talk that morning, Mrs. Willis, when it was that he made the *first* attempt on the life of Carson Dwight?"

"Well, I don't know as I did *then*," the woman answered; "but he told us about it the day after he fired the shot."

"Oh, he did!" Garner's face was still a study of guileless indifference, and he stroked his chin again, his eyes now on the floor, his arms folded across his breast. "What day was that, Mrs. Willis?"

"Why, the day after Mr. Dwight kept the mob from hangin' old Lindy Warren's boy."

Profound astonishment was now visible on every countenance except that of Garner. "I never knew positively before *who* fired that shot," he said, carelessly, "though, of course, I had an idea who did it. So Dan admitted that?"

"Yes, he told us about that, and about tryin' to git at Mr. Dwight several other times."

"I reckon you are satisfied in your own mind that if Mr. Dwight hadn't defended himself Dan would have killed him?" Garner pursued, adroitly.

"I know he would, Mr. Garner, an' when I heard the report that Danny had shot hisse'f by accident, while he was practisin' with his pistol, I was reconciled to it. I didn't think Mr. Dwight was to blame. I always thought he was doin' the best he could, an' that politics caused the bad blood. I always liked 'im, to tell the truth. I'd heard that he was a friend to the pore an' humble, even to pore old niggers, an' somehow I felt relieved when I heard he'd

escaped my boy. I knowed Danny meant murder an' that no good could come of it. I'd a sight ruther know a child of mine was dead an' in the hands of his Maker than tied up in jail waitin' to be publicly hung in the end. No, it is better like it is, though if I may be allowed to say so, I can't for the life of me, understand what you-all have got Mr. Dwight hauled up here like this, when his mother is in sech a delicate condition. Good Lord, he hain't done nothin' to be tried for!"

"That will do, Mrs. Willis," Garner was heard to say, his voice harshly stirring the emotion-packed stillness of the room; "that will do, unless my brother Mayhew wants to ask you some questions."

"The State has no case, your honor," Mayhew said, with a sickly smile. "The truth is, I think we've all been imbibing too freely of politics. I confess I've listened to Wiggin myself. It looks like, failing to get Dan Willis to kill Dwight, he's set about trying to have it done by law. Your honor, the State is out of the case."

There was a pause of astonishment and then the truth burst upon the audience. Realizing that Carson Dwight was more than a free man, vindicated, restored to them, "the gang" rose as a man and yelled. Led by Pole Baker and the enthusiastic Braider, they pressed around him, climbing over the railing and crushing chairs to splinters. Then, amid the shouts and glad tears of the spectators, the most popular man in the county was raised perforce upon the stout shoulders of Baker and Braider and borne down the aisle towards the door.

Above the heads of all, Carson, flushed with con-

fusion, glanced over the room. Immediately in front of him stood Helen. She was looking straight and eagerly at him, her face aglow, her eyes filled with tears. She paused with her father just outside the door, and as "the gang" bore their struggling and protesting hero past, she raised her hand to him. Blushing in fresh embarrassment, he took it, only to have it torn from him the next instant.

"Let me down, Pole!" he cried.

"No, sir, we don't let you down!" Pole shouted. "We've got it in for you. We are goin' to lynch you!"

The crowd, appreciating the joke, thereupon raised the queerest cry that ever burst from breasts surcharged with joy.

"Lynch him!" they yelled. "Lynch him!"

Half an hour afterwards Carson went home. His father was at the fence looking for him. He had heard the news and his old face was beaming with joy as he opened the gate for his son and took him into his arms.

"How's mother?" was Carson's first inquiry.

"She's all right and she knows, too?"

"She knows!" Carson exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes, old Mrs. Parsons was the first to bring me the news, and she assured me she could impart it to your mother in such a way as not to shock her at all."

"And you let her?" Carson said, anxiously.

"Yes, and she did the slickest piece of work I ever heard of. I knew she was considered a wonderful woman, but she's the smoothest article I ever met. I laughed till I cried. I was in the mood for laugh-

ing, anyway. Mrs. Parsons began by adroitly working your mother up to such a pitch of fury against Willis for his nagging pursuit of you that your mother could have shot him herself, and then, in an off-hand way, Mrs. Parsons led on to the meeting between you. Willis had his gun in your face, and was about to pull the trigger, when your pistol went off and saved your life. She went on to say that Dan's mother had just been to the court-house testifying that her son had tried to murder you, and that she didn't blame you in the slightest. I declare, Mrs. Parsons actually made it appear that Willis was on trial instead of you. Anyway, it's all right. We've got nothing to fear now."

XLVII

SIX weeks later the election came off. It was no "walk-over" for Carson. Wiggin seemed only more desperately spurred on by every exposition of his underhand chicanery. He died hard. He fought with his nose in the mire, but, throwing honor to the winds, he fought. Carson Dwight's stand on the negro question was Wiggin's strongest weapon. It was a torch with which the candidate could inflame the breasts of a certain class of men at a moment's notice. He was a crude but powerful speaker, and wherever he went he left smouldering or raging fires. Pledged to him were the lowest order of men, and they fought for him and worked for him like bandits in the dark. Over these men he wielded a sword of fear. Carson Dwight's intention in getting to the legislature was to make laws against lynching, and every man who had ever protected his home and fireside by summary justice to the black brutes would be ferrcted out and imprisoned for life. But Dwight's more gentle and saner reasoning, backed by his heroic conduct of the past, held sway. He was elected. He was not only elected, but, as the exponent of a new issue, the news of his election was telegraphed all over the South. He had written some articles for Wade Tingle's

paper which had been widely copied and commented on, and his political course was watched by many conservative thinkers, who prophesied a remarkable career for him. He was a fearless man, with a new voice, who had taken a radical stand based on humanitarian and Christian principles. Family history was simply repeating itself. His ancestors had stood for the humane treatment of the slaves thrust upon them by circumstances, and he, in the same hereditary spirit, was standing for kind, just treatment of those ex-slaves and their descendants. No man who knew him would have accused him of believing in the social equality of the races any more than they would earlier have brought the same charge against his ancestors.

On the night the returns were brought in and it was known that he had triumphed, "the gang" had arranged a big pine torch-light procession, and it passed with its blaze and din through every street of the town. Carson was at home when they lined themselves, in all their tooting of horns, beating of drums, and general clatter, along the front fence. The town brass-band did its best, and every sort of transparency that the inventive mind of Wade Tingle could devise was borne, as if by the smoke and heat of the torches themselves, above the long procession.

Garner separated himself from the throng, and, clad in a new and costly suit of clothes, a tribute to his engagement to Miss Tarpley—a fine black frock-coat, broadcloth trousers, and a silk hat—he made his way into the house and up the stairs to the veranda above, where Carson and his mother and father were standing.

"The boys want a speech," he said to Carson, "and you've got to give them the best in your shop. By George, they deserve it." Carson was demurring, but his mother pressed him to comply, and Garner, with his stateliest strut, his coat buttoned so tightly at the waist that the tails spread out as if inviting him to sit down, and his hat held on a level with his left shoulder, advanced to the balustrade, and in his happiest mood introduced the man who, he declared, was the broadest-minded, the most conscientious and fearless candidate that ever trod the boards of a political platform. They were to receive the expression of gratitude and appreciation of a man whose name was written upon every heart present. Garner had the distinguished honor and pride to introduce his law partner and close friend, the Hon. Carson Dwight.

Carson never spoke better in his life. What he said was from a boyish heart overflowing with content and good-will. When he had finished Mrs. Dwight rose from her chair and proudly stood by his side. The cheers at her appearance rent the air. Then Garner pushed old Dwight forward from the shadow of a column where he was standing, and as the old gentleman awkwardly bowed his greeting, the cheers broke out afresh. Bob Smith, who was a sort of drum-major, with a ribbon-wound walking-cane for a baton, struck up, "For he's a jolly good fellow," and as the crowd sang it to the spluttering and jangling accompaniment of the band the procession moved down the street.

At this juncture Major Warren came up to offer his congratulations. Carson was standing a few

minutes later talking to Garner. He was trying to hear what his partner was saying in his bubbling and enthusiastic way about his engagement to Miss Tarpley, but he found it difficult to listen, for the conversation between his mother and Major Warren had fixed his attention.

"I tried to get her to come over to hear the speech, but she wouldn't," the Major was saying. "I can't make her out here lately, Mrs. Dwight. She used to be so different in anything concerning Carson. She is now actually hiding behind the vines on the veranda."

"Perhaps she is so much in love with Mr. Sanders that she—"

"That's the very point," the Major broke in. "She won't talk about Sanders, and she—well, really, I think the two have quit writing to each other."

"Perhaps she—oh, do you think, Major, that—"

Carson heard no more; his father had come forward and was talking to Garner.

Carson slipped away. He glided down the stairs and out at the door on the side next to Warren's and rapidly strode across the grass. Passing through the little gateway, he reached the veranda and the vines concealing the spot where the hammock was hanging. He saw no one at first and heard no sound. Then he called out:

"Helen!"

"What is it?" a timid, even startled voice from the vines answered, and Helen looked out.

"Why didn't you come over with your father?" Carson asked. "He said he wanted you to, but you preferred to stay here."

"I *did* want to congratulate you," Helen, said, as

he came up the steps and they stood face to face. "I'm so happy over it, Carson, that really I was afraid I'd show it too much."

"I'm glad you feel that way," he said, awkwardly. "It was a hard fight, and I thought several times I was beaten."

"What did you ever touch that wasn't hard?" she said, with a sweet, reminiscent laugh.

They were silent for a moment and then he said: "I'm not quite satisfied with your reason for not coming over with your father just now—really, you see, it is in a line with your actions for the last six weeks. Helen, you actually have avoided me."

"On the contrary," she said, "you have made it a point to stay away from me."

"Well," he sighed, "considering, you know, Sanders and his claims, I really thought I'd better keep my place."

"Oh!" Helen exclaimed, and then she sank deeper into the vines.

For one instant he stood trembling before her, and then he asked, boldly: "Helen, tell me, are you engaged to him?"

She made no answer for a moment, and then in the moonlight he saw her flushed face against the vines and caught an almost startled glance from her wonderful eyes. She looked straight at him.

"No, I'm not, and I never have been," she said.

"You never have been?" he repeated. "Oh, Helen—" But he went no further. For a moment he hung fire, then he said:

"Don't you care for him, Helen? Are you and I good enough friends for me to dare to ask that?"

"I thought once that I might love him, *in time*," she faltered; "but when I came home and found—and found how deeply I had misunderstood and wronged you, I—I—" She broke off, her face buried in the leaves of the vines.

"Oh, Helen!" he cried; "do you realize what you are saying to me? You know my whole life is wrapped up in you. Don't raise my hopes to-night unless there is at least *some* chance of my winning. If there is *one little chance*, I'll struggle for it all the rest of my life."

"Do you remember," she asked, looking at him, one side of her flushed face pressed against the vines—"do you remember the night you told me in the garden about that awful trouble of yours, and I promised to bear it with you?"

"Yes," he said, wonderingly.

"Well," she went on, "I went straight to my room after I left you and wrote to Mr. Sanders. I told him exactly how I felt. I simply couldn't keep up a correspondence with him after—Carson, I knew that night when I left you there in your gloom and sorrow that I loved you with all my soul and body. Oh, Carson, when I heard your voice in your glorious speech just now, and knew that you have loved me all this time, I was so glad that I cried. I'm the happiest, proudest girl on earth."

And as they stood hand in hand, too joyful for utterance, the glow of his triumph lit the sky and the din and clatter, the song and shouts of those who loved him were borne to him on the breeze.

THE END